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JOHN
CALDWELL.

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Epistolary Correspondence

BETWEEN
S. P. and R. S.

Relating to the LETTERS on THERON
and ASPASIO.

WITH
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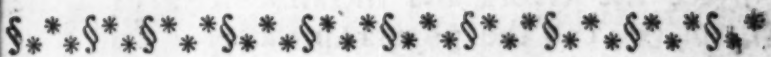


A N

Epistolary Correspondence

BETWEEN

S. P. AND R. S.



LETTER I.

S. P. to R. S.

SIR,

THE elaborate and ingenious performance on *Theron* and *Aspasio*, of which you are judged to be the author, has occasioned many thoughts in my mind, and much conversation with friends. For my own part, I must profess, that there are many thoughts and sentiments in it that are of great value and importance, apprehending *your* description, both of the ground of our justification, and the nature of justifying faith to be true and just. And hope, so far, have reason to be thankful, your letters ever came to hand; for they have contributed not only to confirm, but likewise to clear and elucidate my own conceptions on the subject. A subject I have

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spent

spent much time and thought upon, and had come in brief to this conclusion; that the only ground of our justification is the atonement and righteousness of Christ, and that true faith is neither more nor less than a cordial belief of the free grace truth concerning it. But what you have written has afforded me clearer and more extensive views of the matter.—But the spirit, the style, the language of your performance is so peculiarly severe and satyrical, that many are at a loss to guess what can be the real intention of the work. Give me leave, Sir, to lay out the various opinions of those within my acquaintance, including my own. And let me beg you to favour me with a reply.

1. Some think your design to be, to detect and correct the errors and inconsistencies of those whom you call the popular preachers; and they apprehend, that you have done it with a *just* severity; looking upon them as deserving the representation you have given of them. But *very few* seem inclined to this sentiment concerning your performance; because it must be allowed, that many of those you nominate, in that number, are truly gracious persons, sincere in their views, and sound in their principles, having a real love to the doctrines of free grace; notwithstanding occasional addresses which are in some views inconsistent with their otherwise professed and beloved principles; and therefore they cannot deserve to be treated as designing crafty persons, having an enmity in their hearts to the free grace of God.

2. Others conceive that your view is to represent the improprieties and inconsistencies of the popular preachers in a *sarcastical* way. Setting forth the evil *tendency* of their addresses, shewing what a sad construction they *may* bear; and how their addresses, many of them, *look like* deceit; without intending to make others believe that these

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preachers are really so designing and vile as you sometimes represent them. For instance, when you say, *the popular preachers worship another God*, that you do not mean this as a *real* truth, but only as a *farcaſtical* reflection on ſome of their principles or addreſſes, urging perſons to certain acts as previous to juſtification: for thoſe acts of the ſoul, if right, flow from juſtifying faith, and ſo the perſon is really juſtified previous to the exertion of them: I ſee likewiſe that ſuch addreſſes may, in a *farcaſtical* way, be treated as deſtructive of true Chriſtianity. But I can ſcarcely perſuade myſelf to think, that you really conceive, thoſe preachers and their writings, upon the whole, to be viewed as *leading ſouls a devout path to hell*. In a word, I conceive the ſeverity of your language to be properly *farcaſtical*: and, for my part, I incline to this opinion of your performance, becauſe I ſee and own great improprieties in many popular addreſſes. But yet there are ſome of your ſeverities that look to be ſo ſolemn and ſincere, that I am at ſome loſs, as when you ſay, that *you know no ſinners more hardened nor greater deſtroyers of mankind than they*; which expreſſions, and others of the ſame ſtamp, induce many to apprehend,

3. That you deſign to expreſs and promote a real deteſtation of them and their writings; and, to intimate that it is dangerous to read their works; that their principles, in general, are inconſiſtent with a work of regeneration; and that they themſelves are, or were, upon the whole, unconverted, designing perſons, and enemies in their hearts to the doctrines of free grace. Which can never be believed by any perſon of charity, concerning ſuch as *Marſhal, Boſton, Erſkine, Gutbrie, Flavell*, and the like. From hence it ariſes,

4. That ſome of my friends are of opinion, that the true intention of your performance is to overturn *Chriſtianity itſelf*; aiming to give ſuch a character

rafter of the best of men, as shall tend to set mankind against them, and so destroy their usefulness. Such are apt to compare your Letters with the crafty view of the piece, intitled *Christianity not founded on Argument*. This is indeed a very heavy charge against you; but I find it is a prevailing spreading opinion, even among some that love the doctrines of free grace; and am informed, that some of the *fashionable* preachers like your performance in this view of it, as intended to sink the character of gospel-preachers, and to strain the doctrines of grace so high as to render them ridiculous. The prevalence of this sentiment concerning your work is that which chiefly grieves me, and has induced me to write in this manner to you, that you may have an opportunity to justify yourself from the charge, if false, and may give me an opportunity to do the same. But, besides, I find others of my friends look upon the very *matter* of your performance as heterodox, and this makes me add,

5. That some think you attempt hereby absolutely to set aside all the calls and invitations of the gospel to sinners. And, (6.) Others think you aim to establish a bare historical faith, and so to set aside all inward experimental religion; because you sometimes speak slightly of *heart-work* in religion.

Thus, Sir, I have given you as faithful a view as I could, in a small compass, of the various apprehensions of friends concerning your work. And now let me intreat you to be as open and clear in giving me a distinct account of your *real design*, and let me know which of these above-mentioned are nearest the truth; together with some evidences and proofs, by references to, or extracts from, your performance.

That you may be under no temptation to be upon the reserve in your reply, I will tell you who

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S. P. to R. S.

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I am. I am a Pastor of a Congregational Church in London, a Lecturer at P——'s Hall, and have published several little tracts, particularly, *A brief Exposition and Recommendation of the Assemblies shorter Catechism*; wherein, seeing they have not described faith itself, but only its acts, I have paraphrased upon it, in a way which expresses the very nature of faith itself, as consisting not in a mere *notional belief* of the truth of the gospel, but in such a real *heartly persuasion* of Christ's fulness and freeness, and of our own emptiness and unworthiness, as effectually moves and encourages the soul to go to, approve of, and depend upon Christ alone for all salvation.

Give me a reply as speedily as you can. If you will indulge me in an epistolary correspondence with you, it will much oblige,

Your humble servant,

Please to inform me, how I may direct to you properly.

S. P.

Jan. 17, 1758.

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LET.

LETTER II.

R. S. to S. P.

SIR,

YOUR letter of *January 17*, came to my hand last week. Your openness and freedom commend you much to me for a correspondent—In the beginning of your letter you acknowledge my “description both of the ground of our justification and the nature of justifying faith to be true and just.” But I have some doubts if you rightly understand me, or if your own conceptions be as yet sufficiently clear on the subject. The reason of my doubting arises from the close of your letter, where, intending to “express the very nature of faith itself,” you describe it “as consisting in not a mere *notional belief* of the truth of the gospel, but such a real *heartly persuasion* of Christ’s fulness and freeness, and of our own emptiness and unworthiness, as effectually moves and encourages the soul to go to, approve of, and depend upon Christ alone for all salvation.” As I have not had the opportunity of seeing any of your printed tracts, I must consider you only as you appear in this letter.

Now it does not appear to me, from the words I have quoted, that you have any clear notion how faith justifies the ungodly. Your description answers rather to something like the notion of faith working by love to manifest the justification of one who is already justified. Something like, I say, because if we do not rightly understand what is that faith which justifies the ungodly, we

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can never have any just apprehension of faith working by love to prove us to be already justified.

To illustrate what I have now said; In the first place, I am dissatisfied with the distinction made betwixt a mere *notional belief* of the truth of the gospel, and a real *heartypersuasion* of Christ's fullness and freeness, &c. For if our intention be to speak of faith, as justifying the ungodly, it is evident that this distinction must serve to draw off the attention of the ungodly person from the truth testified concerning Christ, which alone gives true relief, unto some anxious concern about the difference betwixt the *notional belief* and the *heartypersuasion*. Now I am still of the mind that the Scripture supports me in maintaining, that every one who obtains a just notion of the person and work of Christ, or whose notion corresponds to what is testified of him, is justified and finds peace with God simply by that very notion. And this notion, as it can be got only by means of testimony, must in the nature of the thing be faith. If any man's notion of Christ proves insufficient to quiet his guilty conscience before God, the reason is, his notion is false, defective, erroneous, or does not correspond with what is testified.

If it be enquired then, what I would say for the relief of one distressed with the sense of guilt? Why, I would tell him, to the best of my ability what the gospel says about Christ. If he still doubted, I would set before him all the evidence furnished me by that same gospel. Thus and thus only would I press, call, invite, exhort or urge him to believe. I would urge him with evidence for the truth. And if the evidence of divine truth did not strike him, what benefit could he receive from the utmost energy of human clamour, pressing him on to the blind business of performing some task called believing? But if it please

please God, that the evidence strike his conscience, then the guilty person finds relief without any exercise or labour of his. And being thus relieved, he is then capable of being instructed in the Christian warfare, of seeing the force and propriety of Christ's commands, and so of being animated to the whole exercise of godliness both in heart and life. And all his godliness consists in love to that which first relieved him.

Throughout the six Letters you will no where find me *speaking slightly of heart-work*, but where it is set up in opposition to, or in place of, that *justifying righteousness* which is the sole spring of all true godliness among men, or in place of the genuine works of love to that righteousness. Whatever person or thing is exalted or esteemed in competition with *this*, must draw our indignation and contempt in proportion as we love the divine truth. Let the slyest, most pious and decent underminer of *this* be canonized for a saint by all the churches in the world, if our hearts are tainted with that charity which is divine, we must hold his character in abomination. The world, the devout, the religious world do still, as formerly, hold *Paul's* sole ground of glorying in the greatest contempt. But however averse they may declare themselves to it, if we be fired with *Paul's* temper we will be even with them, and be ready to retort upon them in his style,—and *I unto the world*.

Our greatest danger is, lest we forget our due regard to the gospel by paying too much to men. And had I formerly understood *certain Idols* of the present generation of Pharisees as well as I do now, I had treated them even with less respect than I have done. And, as was once said in a time of greater danger than any of us are exposed to at present, I and my friends (for I have some in *Scotland*, and you tell me, a very few with you) are

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are ready to reply to all those who complain of the indignant aspect which our faith bears to this good world, *We are not careful to answer in this matter.*

As I cannot propose, by any thing I now say, to express my serious thoughts more clearly than I have already done in my printed letters; perhaps I must still be put to the question, whether I am in jest or in earnest. Well then, if you think it will make any of my readers any wiser, I fully empower you to tell them from me, that *I am in earnest* from the beginning to the end of the six letters. I hope they will not insist for my oath. Neither do I apprehend it needful. For, if, in reading the letters, they are not led to think of some greater authority to over-awe their consciences, than the seriousness of the letter-writer, it ought to be a matter of small moment to him, whether he be accounted a serious man or a buffoon. I apprehend, however, that the serious purport and intent of the letters will not be questioned by those who know that they contain the doctrine constantly maintained by several congregational churches in *Scotland*, who have been, for twenty years and upwards, treated with great hatred and scorn on account of their faith, and their practice influenced by it; especially by their devout neighbours, and still more especially by the greatest admirers of *Marshall, Boston, Erskine*, and the like.

But, not to lose sight of the fore-cited description of faith, I would ask, whether these two different forms of expression, *belief of the truth of the gospel*, and *persuasion of Christ's fulness and freeness*, &c. are intended to convey different ideas? The reason of my asking this question is, I find some people laying great stress on a very idle distinction betwixt believing the *doctrine* and believing on the *person* of Christ; the use of which I cannot conceive, unless it be to promote some sort of blind enthusiasm: for what can we know about Christ,

or

or what benefit can we receive from him, but by means of the apostolic doctrine concerning him. I do not here charge you with this distinction; I only mention it to hint my doubt if you stand fully clear of it.

But what I chiefly intended to notice in your description of faith, is your calling it *such* a persuasion of Christ's fulness and freeness, and of our own emptiness and unworthiness, *as effectually moves and encourages the soul to go to, approve of, and depend upon Christ alone for all salvation.* A disposition to approve of, and depend on Christ for all salvation, is, I think, commonly understood to be a disposition to be freed from all sin, and to be perfected in holiness; for herein our salvation consists as well as in deliverance from the curse. Now I agree with you in maintaining, that faith, is the principle and spring of every good disposition or of every good work; but at the same time I maintain, that faith does not justify the ungodly as a principle of good dispositions.

We shall conceive this matter the more clearly, if we attend to the two senses of justifying faith given us by *Paul* and *James*. *Paul* speaks of faith justifying the ungodly: and he says it justifies without works. *James* speaks of faith forming a man's character, or influencing a believer's life; and so justifying one who is already just, or declaring him to be so: And he says, it justifies together with works, or that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Now if it be enquired, how faith, justifying the ungodly, or pacifying the guilty conscience, is to be described; I see no way of describing it but by what is testified and believed. The teacher must present nothing to the ear but the work of Christ; the attention of the hearer must be drawn to nothing else: for so soon as the work of Christ is understood the hearer is justified; his conscience

is

acquited by what he hears Christ hath already done. If you ask what relieves him, he answers, he is relieved by his faith, that is, by his creed. If you ask what is his creed, he talks to you only of Christ's work, and is glad to think he has evidence sufficient to support him in affirming before God and man, *it is finished*. Faith justifies the ungodly then, only by the knowledge of Christ's work, or as it is that knowledge. But if we should talk of faith justifying the ungodly, as a principle of good dispositions, or as disposing our hearts aright toward Christ: what must the result be? I think it must come to this; that out of a sense of our own emptiness and unworthiness, having at present nothing to pay, we are to exhibit a promissory note for our justification. At least, in this way we can never have peace in our consciences, till we be sensible of some beginning of a good disposition toward Christ.

If, again, faith is to be described as a principle of action, forming the characters of men, that its professors may be directed in their self-examination; I know no way of describing it but by its fruits, the exercises of mind and suitable works of self-denied service which it properly produces. In the former case the teacher has room to utter his knowledge of Christ, here he has room to shew not only that, but also his knowledge and experience of the Christian warfare. In the former case he has occasion to describe the *common faith*, the faith of God's elect, the faith once delivered to the saints, by commending *the righteousness which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference*. In the latter, he has occasion to observe the various cases and characters of men, formed under the Christian profession, and so to distinguish one man's faith, as a principle of life and action from that of another. He observes this man's faith strong, and that

that man's weak, one whose faith grows exceedingly, and his charity abounds; another again, whose faith seems ready to fail. The weak need the Assistance of the strong in the Christian profession. But the weakest faith justifies in *Paul's* sense equally as the strongest. For the divinerighteousness which is believed, being neither subject to growth nor decay, nor to any variation, is unto all and upon all them that believe without difference.

As education in the churches was certainly intended for confirming and perfecting the faith of them that believe, I see no better direction that can be given to all its professors, than by pointing out *Abraham* for their pattern, and saying with *James*, *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?* And if any man's faith do not shew itself in works of love to that truth which is the sole hinge of Christian union and charity, and which the world in its most decent form always hates, I am very well satisfied that his faith be called empty, notional, historical, traditionary, or any epithet by which one would signify, that *faith without works is dead*, or that *faith is dead being alone*. For I am not disposed to strive about words, provided the Scripture-notion of things be retained.

Now to give a short summary of what has been said; Faith, I say, does not justify the ungodly, nor pacify the guilty conscience as the principle of any good disposition; but it pacifies the conscience, or furnishes the answer of a good conscience, before God, by Christ's works alone without ours, and so becomes the principle of good dispositions and works. The truth testified concerning Christ, made known to the conscience, gives peace; and by doing this, becomes in us a principle to will and to do what is pleasing to God. For if any thing, beside the work of Christ, be considered in my thoughts as needful to quiet the

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sense of guilt, I must still be in doubt, if I have done that thing, be it called believing, or by any other name, really with sufficient heartiness, seriousness or sincerity; so I can never so much as begin to love God, while I do not perceive his justice as already satisfied. I can never begin to love God, I say, till I first see him just in justifying me, ungodly as I stand.

I have chosen to be the more particular on this subject, for the reason mentioned, near the beginning of my letter. You seem indeed to coincide with my meaning, in that part of your letter, where you say, "I see and own great improprieties, in many popular addresses, urging persons to certain acts as previous to justification; for those acts of soul, if right, flow from justifying faith, and so the person is really justified, previous to the exertion of them." But as your fore-cited description of justifying faith is such as many preachers, whom I oppose, will readily agree to, as it evidently carries the air of their doctrine; I am led to doubt, if you clearly understand the difference betwixt me and them.

Now if you do not perceive, the importance and extent of the difference betwixt my opponents and me, it is impossible you can digest the severity of my style against them. Yea, you must bear a warm side toward them, and be disposed to palliate their errors as only occasional improprieties. But it is the very soul, spirit and scope of their doctrine, as it lives and acts in thousands, that I attack. I oppose their most formal descriptions of faith, wherein they study the greatest niceness and accuracy. In a word, I oppose the passages in their writings that are most admired by their followers. If you want an instance of this, you find a very remarkable one already produced in my sixth letter, p. 448. It is indeed astonishing to find the congregational churches, where it

might be expected the apostolic doctrine should be preserved in its greatest purity, learning their faith from the keenest enemies of Christ's doctrine of the kingdom of heaven, from sworn enemies to the christian order; and not only so, but learning it from such passages of their writings, as most palpably undermine the righteousness of the Lord and Saviour, by teaching the hearers to establish their own. No man who duly attends to this will say, that only the out-works or occasional improprieties of the popular doctrine are obnoxious to my censure.

Besides, it ought to be remembered, I do not quote from the mouth of the preacher, where improprieties and inadvertencies may easily be overlooked. I quote from the deliberate writings and printed books, not of a few less noted preachers, but of those eminent men, who are considered as patterns of preaching to others. Again, not of men whose reputation rests on the opinion of one party, but the men of chief note for orthodoxy in both the established churches, as well as among the dissenters. And what is more, I chiefly attack that leading sentiment, wherein, notwithstanding their various other differences, they are principally agreed, and mutually support each other, in opposition to the faith I contend for.

You kindly offer me an opportunity of justifying myself from the heavy charge of intending to overturn Christianity itself, and of being destitute of charity; and you obligingly offer me your service in reporting my defence. But I incline to save both you and myself this trouble. I and my friends are well familiarized with the charge of being enemies to Christianity, and destitute of charity; and what is more, we do not want to appear in an other light to our adversaries. It rather gives us pain, when we find some votaries of the popular doctrine ready, through ignorance and

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and mistake, to consider us as good christians, on a footing with themselves. Christianity and charity are words expressive of the scheme and temper which every party is fondest of. Even our reviewers are ready to shew us their approbation or dislike, by telling us what is suitable or disagreeable to the spirit of Christianity. In Christian nations these words have much the same import, as *zeal for the Law* had among the Jews, who said in contempt of those who hearkened to Christ, *Have any of the Rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.*

Mean time, there is no occasion to fear that ancient Christianity be injured by debasing the names most highly esteemed among men. Christianity rather suffers when the character of God is debased. And this is always done when men go about to vitiate or change the true ground of acceptance with him.—As you have mentioned that crafty piece, *Christianity not founded on Argument*, I will here take the liberty to say, that, for all the replies to it I have yet seen, it remains unanswered, except by the principles maintained in my Letters.—But then I have “strained the doctrines of grace so high as to render them ridiculous.” On this I shall only say, that these doctrines, as they are simply exhibited in the New Testament, always were and will be ridiculous in the eyes of the men of note for devotion, as well as the men of fashion. And no man needs to quarrel with me for holding them in such ridiculous light, while I lay myself fairly open to share in the ridicule.

The notion of divine grace, maintained in the letters, is the bond of union in the churches with us, and it is the great hinge on which our discipline turns. We receive none but such as seem to understand and love it: and we excommunicate every one who discovers his ignorance or dislike of

it. This you will easily see must make the good people of our neighbourhood averse to us. Yet, if you were acquainted with our most observant enemies in *Scotland*, you would find that they are no less averse to us on account of our straining the doctrines of Christian practice, particularly Christ's doctrine of alms-giving, in opposition to covetousness, to a like ridiculous height as those about grace.—In the one respect, the good people are offended with us for legalism, or setting up the Popish merit of good works; and in the other, for antinomianism. For you may easily judge, the good people would not find fault with us but for something that is bad. You may likewise readily conclude, that as these causes procure us hatred and contempt, so they naturally tend to make us both poor and few; and so to prevent our making head, as a faction or party of this world. You will at the same time observe, that, so far as our doctrine reconciles our minds to these consequences, we will be the less anxious about what light we are considered in by different parties; and we will be the less disposed to court the favour of any party, by attempting to soften or remove the causes of their displeasure.

I apprehend it is no very difficult matter to write on religion in such a manner as to impress the generality of readers with at least a high opinion of the author's piety! though they should receive no other benefit by what is written. This is a path sufficiently beaten. And the author's pious design is commonly pleaded, and commonly serves as a vail to cover his defects and blemishes. The letters on *Theron* and *Aspasio* beg no quarter from the public on this score. An attentive reader of them needs, I think, be at no loss to see that the author expects and defies the resentment of all parties.

If I have used freedom with several highly respected names, has not Mr. *Hervey* invited me, or rather

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rather compelled me, to try their weight and value according to the standard of truth, by the manner in which he has extolled them? He commended them as guides to heaven. When I compared them with the New Testament, I found them leading us the contrary road. And what should hinder me from expressing my mind as freely as Mr. *Hervey* has done his? I have since had the opportunity of observing how few religious people read the New Testament with attention, by finding so many boggling at the expression of *a devout path to hell*. When the Pharisees converted an idolatrous Pagan to become their proselyte, did they not make him zealous for God and his law, so more devout than he was before? Yet Christ says, they made him twofold more the child of Hell than themselves. I have likewise seen, by a very palpable proof, that the bulk of religious people are swayed much more by reverence for eminent men, than by the fear of God and his word. I find most of them much more interested about the honour and credit of their Rabbies, than the controversy about acceptance with God.

But then, I have charged artifice and bad design upon these eminent men. It is evident, I think, from my letters, that they and I differ about the faith, or that they oppose, what I call *the faith once delivered to the saints*, even as I oppose their faith. Now that I have not mistaken them, I have the testimony of many who must be considered as the properest witnesses in this case. For I daily find all their most zealous and intelligent admirers, who certainly ought to understand their doctrine best, ready to depreciate, as insignificant, what I call justifying faith, by every epithet of disgust and contempt. This being the open state of the case, how can I think that men can undermine the most holy faith with a good design? Or how can I think that men can use the very word

of God itself to serve that purpose, in simplicity and godly sincerity.

When I see a train of manifold artifice serving one purpose, and undermining what I hold most sacred, must I think of no contriver? And must I shut my eyes, or tenderly throw a vail over the artifice, for fear, lest some reflection should fall on the contriver? For my part the perverters of the gospel are at full liberty, to proportion, among themselves, what share in the contrivance falls to each; only, I claim the liberty of exposing every artifice against the truth, let the blame of the contrivance light where it may.—I have heard complaints from many, of my severity against the popular preachers; but from what I have said, both now and formerly, you will perceive that the complainers must appear to me, as only taking that method of acquainting me, that they dislike the faith I contend for.

Moreover, I am told, some fashionable preachers like my performance as intended to sink the characters of those called, gospel-preachers. I am glad to hear it. Let the latter defend themselves. Perhaps, during the fray, some few detached individuals, perceiving mistakes upon both sides, may come to obtain some notion of the ancient gospel: and thus *Palæmon's* end will be gained.—I understand that those, reckoned gospel-preachers in *Scotland*, have been exposed to the like inconveniency by the means of my letters. Yet I am acquainted with near a score of gospel-preachers, who seem no way apprehensive of having their characters sunk by the emulation of any party, or by means of any production from the press. Perhaps it will be said, they are already so low as to be almost beneath the fear of sinking much farther, even as, according to the common similitude, the shrub easily escapes the storm that bears hard on the stately tree. However that be, one thing

thing is certain, the gospel itself sunk the characters of its first preachers so low in the world, as rendered it quite absurd for them to emulate in reputation the men of wisdom, taste, and fashion, and so saved them the disgrace of being foiled in the contest.—I, and my friends, in rating gospel-preachers, judge it safest, first to settle in our minds what is the gospel that *Paul* preached; and we consider none as gospel-preachers but those who fairly preach that. If men do not fairly preach that, it signifies little to us what pretensions they may have to the character of being “truly gracious persons, sincere in their views, sound in their principles, or having a real love to the doctrines of what is called Free Grace.” Many, it would seem, having first imbibed a high opinion of the goodness of certain eminent preachers, too fondly or inconsiderately presume that their doctrine must be sound. When the doctrine thus sound found comes to be retailed by succeeding preachers, these also become good men by virtue of the sound doctrine. And by this rotation of the goodness of men, and soundness of doctrine, the attention of many is drawn away from the ancient form of sound words and simplicity of the apostolic faith: which insensibly wears out of sight, while the minds of men are occupied with the importance of other things very foreign to it.

Now, if I must give my opinion of my own performance, I am ready to say, that *Palæmon* proposes to contend for the divine righteousness, finished on the cross, as the sole requisite to justification. In evincing this, he looks around on all sorts of men, and examines their various pretensions to righteousness on every side. Whatever he finds opposed to or set up instead of the divine righteousness he resolutely attacks. In doing this, he makes use of every weapon he can lay his

his hand upon, and according to his various occasions, he lays hold on whatever weapon he can most readily wield, and by which he may cut deepest, whether it be keen satyr, disdainful irony, the contemptuous smile, indignant frown, or more cool reasoning. And all along, he appears to think very gravely that the Scripture supports him in all this. He seems particularly to have had in his eye *Jeremiah's* maxim of war, *spare no arrows*. While, in pursuance of his main design, he sets aside all the boasted distinctions among men, reducing all to their level, or shewing *there is no difference*, it will readily appear to the few friends of *Paul's* gospel, that the popular doctrine, with its contrivers and followers, behoved to be the principal object of his attention and opposition, as being the thing most highly lifted up among men, and with greatest artifice too, against the revealed righteousness. Yet the popular preachers cannot with a good grace complain that he has courted the favour of any set of their opponents to their prejudice. So far from that, he has always allowed them the first claim to be highly esteemed among men, as being foremost in the national righteousness. Yet, on account of this very precedence, he considers them as remotest from the kingdom of heaven. As he views the self righteous pretensions of all sorts of men as founded in deceit, so he beholds the selfrighteousness promoted by the popular doctrine, while lifting its head highest, as supported by the greatest complication of artifice, deceit, and hypocrisy: all other disguises or pretences to righteousness being much more easily seen through. Add to this, that the deceit of the popular doctrine proceeds wholly on the abuse of the clearest and most august revelation of divine grace and truth.

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any fondness for the letters, and that only on some occasions, or in some respects; for if we may judge of them in general by their good friends the Reviewers, the letters serve to awaken in them no small *fretfulness and disgust*. Yea, they seem on this occasion, as fellow sufferers, to sympathize with the popular preachers, whom they do not chuse to see handled in quite so serious a manner, but would rather retain, as usual, for a fund of pleasantries to themselves and their friends: whereas, in the progress of my opposition to the popular doctrine, they must frequently find occasion for the old complaint.—*Thus saying, thou reproachest us also.*

However, as I hinted already, if the jostling of different parties, quarreling about their several pretensions to righteousness, shall serve to publish the controversy, and awaken the attention of some scattered individuals to *Paul's* gospel, my end is gained. So you see it is a matter of no great moment to me what they say about the Letters, provided they only talk enough or make a sufficient noise about them. You will likewise observe, that my design must be chiefly thwarted by those prudent preachers, who, cautious above all things of their worldly ease and tranquillity, read the Letters and hold their peace, affecting a very cool neutrality, and desiring nothing more than to see the controversy quietly hushed.

As I proposed to contend for *Paul's* gospel, it must be some satisfaction to me to observe the account I have given of it having any effect similar to what attended his first preaching it. Upon one occasion we are told, *And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.* Upon another,—*Some mocked, and others said, we will hear thee again of this matter.—Howbeit, certain men clave unto him and believed, few of any note it would seem, among the which was Dionysius*

nysius the Areepagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

If one would enter into my views, or yet oppose me pertinently, he ought particularly to consider my *third* Letter, where I endeavour to modernize the ancient controversy about the gospel, or accommodate it to our own times. You will see there, that I consider the popular preachers in the same light wherein Christ and *Paul* point out the Pharisees and Judaizers. And I have endeavoured to imitate the example given me, in the temper I have shewn toward them. I allow them their proper excellency, in comparison with other parties, while yet I keep this in my eye, that the publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of God before them.

Were I to point out any passages in my Letters that I am particularly fond of, I would mention that in the close of my fifth letter; where the conversion of a popular preacher is described; the recommendation of books near the middle of the sixth letter, and the two notes near the end. Not that these passages contain any thing but what is aimed at in every page; but as they have proved, especially the second, fit for the purpose of awakening attention to the main design of the book.

I have only to add, that, throughout your letter, you do not seem to attend sufficiently to the importance of the controversy; nor to reflect that men may be as self-righteous in the Christian as in the Jewish way; as much in acts of soul about what is called Christ, as the Jews in their zeal about the law. For even in that part of your letter, where your words come nearest to my sense, you speak of those acts of soul, which I call self-righteous, in such a manner, as if the chief fault, to be found with them, lay in the impropriety of timeing them wrong, and as if they *might be right*, if rightly timed or placed. Whereas,
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self-justifying acts must ever be in their very nature extremely opposite to works of love to the justifying righteousness already finished; so can never in any shape or in any respect be supposed to be *right*, or to *flow from justifying faith*.

You see I am far from declining the correspondence you have so frankly offered. And I hope the length of my letter will serve as an apology for its not being sooner forwarded. I presume likewise I have not by any reserve precluded your further freedom. My chief aim, you see, has been to lead you to re-consider the main hinge of the controversy.

On the whole, I am obliged to you for your letter, which contains the most distinct account I have yet heard of the reception of my Letters, and the Impression they have made in *London*; which is the more agreeable to me, as it corresponds so much with what I have heard from other places, and often hear in the place where I live. And if you will take the trouble to report my warmest respects to the few, who it seems have greater sensibility and tenderness for the ancient gospel, than for the credit of any man; assuring them I regard them not the less for their being very few, you will still more oblige,

S I R,

Your very humble Servant,

Feb. 2, 1758.

R. S.

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LETTER III.

S. P. to R. S.

S I R.

YOUR frank and open reply to my last, encourages me to take the freedom of continuing the correspondence; in hope that it may be mutually useful. And that it may be the more so, I shall write without reserve in making objections and proposing queries relating to the important subject treated of in your Letters. I shall take no notice of any little difference between us, about *meats*, or *titles*, or the *millennium*, &c. but keep in view the one thing needful. The sentiments you have exhibited in your reply to me, concerning the nature of faith, and of faith as justifying and sanctifying, are such as I truly approve of; although we may fall into a very different way of expression upon the same subject. And I heartily concur with you in saying, "That whatever person or thing is exalted or
 "esteemed in competition with the righteousness
 "of Christ, in the matter of justification, must
 "draw our indignation, in proportion as we love
 the divine truth." But what a pity is it, that where we are united in the same foundation-truth, we should so widely differ about human persons and human writings. And perhaps you will think it a sufficient reason to suspect my clearness in these points, if I venture to speak in behalf of those writers and writings which you so vehemently

mently oppose. Be that as it will, I must write my mind freely upon them.

You very justly observe, "that if I do not perceive the importance and extent of the difference between you and your opponents, it is impossible I should digest the severity of your stile against them:" but it does not immediately follow, that "I must bear a warm side towards them:" for I may conceive *your* sentiments and expressions upon the momentous point to be in some respects more clear, pure and consistent than *theirs*; and so far may rather bear a warm side towards your faith.

However, that I may more fully see the importance of the difference between you and them, I shall put a few plain questions, to which I must beg you would give me a succinct answer, void of that severity of stile which seems too natural to you. If I understand and receive the truth, it must be upon the footing of *evidence*, and not of satyrical language. These questions I shall reserve to the close of this letter, and in the meantime give my opinion, how far I apprehend you have mistaken or misrepresented the writings you oppose; in order that you may see how far I disapprove your spirit, though I cordially embrace your principles, so far as at present I have a conception of them.

You speak of the idols of the present generation of Pharisees. Which very expression has an air of contempt and envy; two principles very opposite to the spirit of Christianity. But what do you imagine such authors are *idolized* (or, to speak in softer language, *admired*) for, especially by the serious part of professed Christians? Is it for their definition of justifying faith? Is it, because they believe assurance to be of its essence? Is it because they sometimes incautiously introduce good duties and good endeavours, and good

motions as previous and preparatory to saving faith? There may be some indeed, that may have their esteem for them raised upon such accounts as these: but I am persuaded for myself, that these are not the general reasons why they are so much approved. So far from it, that most, within the compass of my knowledge, look upon these particulars as *defects* in their writings. What they are valued for, besides the liveliness and seriousness of their stile; is because they clearly state and defend the doctrine of free justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. And if so, what are you about, while you take all pains to depreciate their writings, and rank them with those that are enemies to those truths? Let me intreat you to be watchful over yourself in this matter, lest you should be found fighting against some of the faithful servants of Jesus Christ. But this I am certain of, that your keenness in these respects is far from having a tendency to answer your end, either upon them or others. It is *argument and evidence*, Sir, which are the only proper method of conviction, by your own acknowledgment. When, in reading your Letters, I see a train of argument pursued to evince the truth, and to detect any corruptions of it, I can read with attention, pleasure and profit. But when you run into the declamatory stile, your writing then appears both unprofitable and offensive.

Besides, I cannot but conceive, that you are sometimes mistaken in your representations of what you call the popular doctrine. For instance: *Upon the popular plan*, say you, *we can never have peace in our consciences, until we be sensible of some beginning of a good disposition in us towards Christ.* Now, setting aside some few unguarded expressions and addresses, you will find, that the general drift and purport of their doctrine is just the contrary

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contrary to this; and they labour this point, both *Marshall* and *Hervey*, to convince persons, that *nothing* of this nature does or can recommend them to God, or be any part of their justifying righteousness: and their principal view is to beget and draw forth such thoughts in the mind, as lead the soul entirely out of itself to Christ alone for righteousness—Again, you say, *the truth testified concerning Christ, made known to the conscience, gives peace, and by this means becomes a principle to will and to do what is pleasing to God.* In this you perfectly coincide with the general plan and view of *Marshall*. And here I must remark, that you have most obviously mistaken that author, in applying the whole that he says concerning *sanctification* or *performing what is pleasing to God*, to the subject of *justification*: in which point he is as clear as you can be.

Upon the whole, it does not appear that the difference between you and them is so very great, since they professedly preach the true doctrine of justification by free grace, and in all their descriptions of faith, however in some respects improperly expressed, aim to direct the eye of the soul to Christ alone for justification.

If there be any *degree* of truth in what is said above; how unhappily are you mistaken in being fond of that description you give of the conversion of a popular preacher, as if such an one must necessarily be an unconverted person; and of that recommendation of books you refer to. Surely you ought, in these respects, to bethink yourself afresh; lest you should come under the awful censure in *Matth. vii. 1, — 5.*

Having just mentioned the affair of giving encomiums upon authors; I would here freely confess that Mr. *Hervey* has been in my esteem much too liberal in giving characters of books: Yet I cannot but be persuaded, that you have gone very far into the contrary extreme. He never men-

tions an author but with a view to recommend him; you, on the contrary, never mention one but with a view to find fault. So that if we should attend to and comply with the spirit that runs through your Letters in this regard, we should be out of conceit with all human writings whatsoever, excepting your own. Which of the two is most criminal in this case, Mr. *Hervey* or yourself, I will not pretend to determine. It is a general maxim, I own, among the popular preachers, that it is safest to err on the charitable side. I cannot join in with this maxim in all cases; but must be so free as to own, I cannot be persuaded that the contrary is always true; or that it is best to err on the most censorious side.

But what most of all surprises me in your Letter is, that you aim to support *the charge of artifice upon these eminent men*. The charge is in its nature very grievous and heavy indeed; and, could it be positively proved, it ought to be laid on with an answerable severity. But here your evidence apparently fails. I should have thought that you would have been contented with ranking them amongst *sincere* Pharisees. But now we have them represented in a point of light, that is odious to Reason as well as Religion, to Heathenism as well as Christianity. What though their admirers depreciate as insignificant, what you call *justifying faith*, with every epithet of contempt and disgust, must you therefore charge them with undermining the most holy faith with a *bad design*? So far from it, that it does not follow, they actually undermine it at all. For it may be, and I am persuaded in many cases it is, no more than a mistake of each others words, which occasions the opposition. But however difficult it may be to persuade you into this opinion; yet surely you ought to have suspended this censure, until you could have brought evident proof of it, or could look into their

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their hearts. Besides, Sir, have you forgot the corruption and deceitfulness of the heart; and do you not know that there is a remainder, at least, of that deceitfulness and depravity even in the hearts of true believers? And shall you then charge them with such sort of wilful contrivance and deceit as gives your readers an idea of them, as wicked designing persons? *Although you claim a liberty of exposing every artifice against the truth,* that is, every instance of false and delusive reasoning; yet you have no liberty to impute it to malicious, wicked and wilful design: remembering that yourself may become chargeable herewith, without your being conscious of any artful or iniquitous views. And had I time and room I could I believe, point out some constructions which you give of the popular writings, that cannot, without a grain of charity, be imputed to anything else, than a wilful perversion of their meaning and design.

I have but one thing more to remark, before I conclude my letter with the intended questions. *You are for making use of every weapon you can most readily wield to attack every false pretension to a justifying righteousness.* You mention *keen satyr, disdainful irony, the contemptuous smile, the indignant frown,* and more *cool reasoning.* But all the while you have forgot the *soft charientismus*, as a weapon you are not expert in the use of: whereas, if you could have condescended to have taken this part of the christian armour, it might have done more execution, because it is properly a *Christian weapon*: “with *meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves, if peradventure God should give them repentance, to the acknowledgment of the truth.”

Now, that I might more clearly see the nature and importance of the difference between you and the popular preachers, I would lay out a few ques-

tions; a plain answer to which may be truly instructive and useful. And assure yourself that I do not put them with a captious or insnaring view, but in true simplicity, to be able to form a clear and decisive judgment of the controversy.

1. How would you exhort, advise or address stupid and unconcerned souls? You have told me in what way you would speak to one under a sense of guilt: but as to these others, is it not their *duty* to read, hear, pray, think, avoid ill company, &c. and are they not then to be exhorted accordingly both in private and public?

2. How does faith justify the ungodly? Is it only by conveying peace into their consciences? Or have you your eye only upon that justification that is in the *conscience*? If so, what notion have you of the time and manner of the actual justification of a *person*, whether an adult or an infant?

3. Is a personal persuasion of *my own* interest in Christ included in the real belief of the truth? If it be, then what is the meaning of your very judicious arguments against the popular sentiment on this head; and what foundation can there be for such a belief; since the Scripture no where declares concerning any particular person, that Christ's righteousness is *his*? If it be not, then how can a mere belief of the gospel-report give *peace* to the conscience; since after all that is directly contained in the gospel, there is room for any person to fear his being for ever miserable?

4. What ideas have you under those *active terms* of coming, trusting, receiving, flying to, labouring, striving, &c. which are found in Scripture? Are they all *self-righteous* acts? And cannot a person actively come to Christ for salvation, embrace him, &c. without being chargeable with doing something in a self-righteous way?

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5. What is your opinion concerning the *doubts* and *fears* of serious persons, as to their state Godward? are such doubts inconsistent with true faith in the conscience? If they are inconsistent therewith, must not then assurance be of the essence of faith; and if not, how can the conscience then be said to be actually pacified by the blood of Christ in a way of pure believing? And what method is a believer to take to get his doubts resolved?

6. What is your notion concerning inherent grace or true holiness in the heart? Is there any such holiness wrought in the heart of a believer, by the Spirit; and is it an abiding principle in the soul or no?

7. Are there any books (besides the Bible) now subsisting, which you can safely recommend to the perusal of persons concerned about religion? Which are they? How far can you recommend them? And cannot you, in some respects, seriously recommend some of those writings, which you have criticised upon?

Several other questions of the like sort may be added, or the most of these may be comprised into this one: What effects has the belief of the simple truth, as to our holiness and comfort? Or I may have occasion to put a few questions more in another letter, unless your answer to these prove sufficient to preclude them. In the mean time, I leave the former part of this letter to your serious perusal, not expecting or desiring an immediate answer thereto. What I am principally concerned about is to have a clear satisfactory answer to the above queries; because what I have most at heart is, more and more to understand the gospel, and to be able to propagate it pure, without any pharisaical or antinomian mixtures.

As you are favoured with the talent of expressing your mind with an happy perspicuity, I hope
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by your reply to obtain a more distinct view of the grand point in contest. And may the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, grant us both more and more of the truth of the gospel in our consciences, and of the spirit of the gospel in our hearts.

I rest your's, &c.

S. P.

March 11, 1758.

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L E T T E R IV.

R. S. to S. P.

SIR,

THOUGH you have already seen my mind in a greater variety of views than I have had access to see yours ; and though it be much easier to ask questions than to give proper and distinct answers to them : yet I am willing to give you any satisfaction the Scripture affords me, as to those you have now laid before me.

I. As to your first question, " How I would exhort, advise or address stupid unconcerned souls, &c." I am of the mind, that a preacher of the gospel, as such, ought to have no influence on men but by means of the gospel which he preaches. We are informed, that when *Paul* discoursed " concerning the faith in Christ, and as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, *Felix* trembled." I think I need not stay to comment on this and other passages, serving to shew that the faith which *Paul* preached is all-sufficient to awaken and to comfort, to wound and to heal.—As to the latter part of the question about *duty*, I am persuaded it is the duty of every man in every condition to obey every divine command. The gospel always supposes this, while addressing all men as sinners, it demonstrates their danger and discovers the remedy. Yet it is absurd to suppose that any man can love the gospel, or obey it, till he believe it. Therefore to urge unbelievers to any shadow of that obedience, as preparative to justification

fication by faith, can have no other effect than to lead them to establish their own righteousness, and to stand in awe of the preacher.—The duties you have specified are chiefly exercises relating to christian devotion. When unbelievers are over-awed into the practice of these, I see the influence of the parish-minister, not of the gospel-preacher. Yet I am persuaded it is the duty of all believing parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, or to train them up in Christianity from their earliest years.

2. As to the next question, “How does faith justify the ungodly? &c.” In order to answer it the more distinctly, I would first separate it from another consideration often confounded with it, to wit, How shall one know that he is justified? I maintain then, that God justifies the ungodly when he imputes righteousness to them. The imputed righteousness is conveyed to men only by the divine revelation concerning it. When this revelation is believed or becomes one’s faith, then he is justified, then righteousness is imputed to him: even as *Paul* says, “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, *his faith is counted for righteousness.*” Hence God is so often said to justify men by faith; or when he persuades them that the righteousness finished by Christ is alone sufficient to justify them.—As to infants; justification comes to a parent, and his house, at the same time by means of the same revelation. For as this whole matter proceeds on the divine word; the address of the gospel bringing salvation to a parent and his house runs thus, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The parent then believing, according to what is spoken, is justified together with his house. And we may as easily conceive

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infants made righteous by Christ's obedience, as made sinners by *Adam's* disobedience.

Now as to the other enquiry, How justification by faith shews itself by its effects on the heart and life? I would say that the first effect of faith is joy or peace with God. And this joy is the beginning of charity, which rejoiceth with the truth. Thus, I say, begins love with all its affections, consent, approbation, esteem, desire, reliance, gratitude, &c. Now if the nature and ground of this joy be enquired into, it will appear, that it does not proceed on any persuasion that I am a justified person; that righteousness is imputed unto me; or that there is any difference whatever betwixt me and others. It proceeds wholly on a new discovery of God. The sinner, to whom this discovery is made, is comforted in beholding God just, in justifying the ungodly, or in knowing that a righteousness sufficient for his acceptance is already finished. He sees now what he could never understand before, that without any work or endeavour on his part, he *may be justified* in the presence of the just God. And this is the very spring of his joy. Now I maintain it, as a sure point of doctrine, that every one who is *thus* persuaded that he *may be justified* is in reality justified, a partaker of the heavenly calling, accepted in the sight of God, and accordingly finds joy and peace in believing. But when this doctrine comes to be applied to particular cases, or when the question is put, How shall it appear that I am a justified person? then a wide field is opened for self-examination, not only as to what I believed for acceptance, but also as to what sort of joy and peace I had in believing. Here the faith of the Apostles and first Christians, with its fruits, must be considered as the authentic standard by which every man must try himself, as well as be judged by others.

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When the nature of that pain, from which the gospel relieves, is attended to, it may well be allowed, that when one is first comforted by the gospel, his mind will be so much occupied with the new and amiable discovery of God exhibited there, as to suspend for some time the question, What am I now, am I a true believer, a justified person, or not? But when his first impressions have somewhat subsided, it will be natural for him to reflect in some such manner as this. "My thoughts have been very agreeably employed. Something new has passed over my mind. This is very like what I read in the New Testament of the first believers in Christ, and of the joy they had when they first knew him. For, methinks, like them I could run all risques for the kingdom of heaven's sake.—But I read in that same book, that many believe only for a while, even many who receive the word with joy as I do,—that many who have been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, &c. may yet fall away irrecoverably. How then shall I be assured of my interest in Christ? What says the Scripture? If ye continue in my word, then shall ye know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.—Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.—I will send you the Comforter.—Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure,—to the full assurance of hope unto the end." I need only add on this head, that they who know Christ, as preached by the apostles, will accordingly love him, and be stimulated by fear, on the one hand, and hope, on the other, to attend to these exhortations; and will grow in joy and confidence as they grow in conformity to Christ: while others, who have taken up with him on some mistake or reserve, will by degrees be disheartened by difficulties, and in the time of temp-

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tation fall away.—Besides, I have spoken largely on this subject in the second volume of the Letters.

3. In speaking to the second question, I apprehend I have already answered the third, unless it should be thought needful to take some notice of the latter part of it, “How can a mere belief of the gospel report give *peace* to the conscience; since after all that is directly contained in the gospel, there is room for any person to fear his being for ever miserable?” How the mere belief of the gospel report can give peace to the conscience, is indeed the first and the great lesson in Christianity, which no man can effectually teach his neighbour. This is the province of God. Yet it is a point well understood among them that believe. I have frequently had occasion to observe people on their being first struck with the evidence of the truth, so comforted with it, as to shew no small surprize, that their neighbours and acquaintance did not perceive it too; imagining they had no more ado to persuade them, but to relate the evidence that convinced themselves; and ready, with a forwardness more generous than wise, to urge that evidence on such as had no relish for the subject. The question readily presents to us the true reason why the gospel concerning Christ crucified is foolishness to the Greek, and a stumbling-block to the Jew; and the true spring of all the pains taken by many preachers to turn the command to believe into some notion of a law of works. The enlivening evidence, or, which is the same thing, the divine glory of the saving truth not being perceived, men must be taught to feel, or do something to recommend them to God, or furnish them with a ground of peace.—On the other hand; many, on whom the gospel has made some impression, thinking it too troublesome a way of making their calling sure, to have the Christian self-denial enforced

ced upon them by the fear of being found hypocrites at last ; have studied to contrive a method of finding that assurance in their first impressions ; but let them contrive as they will, they can never find a method that in effect will answer the purpose. Yet they who know the genuine truth, will thence, in the midst of all their fears, be still animated with good hope, as the prevailing principle with them, and so be encouraged to endure unto the end : for never was it more pleasant for the eyes to behold the light of the sun, than for the guilty conscience to behold the evidence of this truth. And this is the “ shining light in the path of the just that shines more and more unto the perfect day.”—Can one enter for a few moments into this subject, and thence turn his eyes on the arts that have been used to hide this glorious light from the eyes of men, without being filled with the utmost indignation ? Or what epithet too severe can he find for such arts as are so employed ?

The great aim throughout my printed Letters is to set forth the comfortable evidence of the simple truth, and at the same time to expose the methods that have been taken to obscure that evidence, or divert our attention from it. Yet I am very sensible that after all the books that have been or can be writ on the subject, the bare report concerning Christ crucified will still be considered, by the bulk of its hearers, as a very weak and foolish ground of comfort. Nevertheless, among them that believe, it will always be discerned and acknowledged as “ the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation.” Such are well apprized that their joy and peace hold pace with their perception of its evidence ; while others will always put the question, “ How can a mere belief of the gospel report give peace to the conscience ?” I have dwelt the longer on this question,

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question, as it is indeed the capital one; as here lies the key to Christian religion, and as here is the point on which believers and unbelievers will ever be greatly divided in their sentiments.

To sum up and illustrate what has been said in answer to the second and third questions, I shall here subjoin the view which the Apostle *James* gives us of this subject. At the time when *Abraham* first believed, his faith was counted or imputed to him for righteousness. This is the Scripture affirmation concerning him. But when faith wrought with his works, and by works was made perfect; then, according to *James*, the Scripture was fulfilled, which faith *Abraham* believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness. What the Scripture *affirms* concerning his faith when he first believed, was now evidently *fulfilled* or verified by the proper effects. As what the Scripture *affirms* concerning the imputation of *Adam's* disobedience, is *fulfilled* or verified in our likeness to him in the corruption of human nature; so what the Scripture *affirms* concerning the imputation of Christ's righteousness to men not working but believing, is *fulfilled* or verified by the proper effects of that imputation; to wit, their casting off the works of darkness, and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, or wearing his character. It is the general affirmation of Scripture concerning all that believe, that their faith is imputed to them for righteousness. This affirmation is fulfilled or verified in particular instances, when men are influenced by their faith to become like what they believe. And the more men grow in likeness of temper and character to Christ, the more do they share of the Spirit as the Comforter, till their joy be made full.

4. As to the active terms of coming, trusting, receiving, flying to, labouring, striving, &c. I have already explained myself sufficiently from p.

365 to 375, where I have taken particular notice of most of these now mentioned. I have distinguished faith from all notions of working on our part, conceived under any of these expressions. But were I to describe the ideas I have under all the terms expressing the duty of believers, I should have a very large task on hand. For, not to mention the number and variety of them, I must frequently have more or less extensive ideas to them according to the scope of the passage where they are used.—By *comers*, Heb. x. 1. *Paul* seems to understand worshippers; and the next chapter he says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he that cometh to God must believe, &c.” Christ says, “No man can come unto me, except the Father draw him;” and this drawing is explained to be divine teaching, which persuades a man to believe the Gospel. We are told, there *came* a leper and worshipped Christ, and we see by his prayer what was the faith that moved him to come. *Paul* at once sets aside all those notions by which faith has been confounded with our motions toward God, when he says, “How shall they call on him on whom they have not believed?”—As to *trusting*, If my neighbour says he believes I am a sufficient man, but will not lend me his money when he can spare it, I say he has no faith in me, because he will not trust me. So if one refuses to lend the Lord, by giving to the poor, I say, “he trusts in uncertain riches, not in the living God.” As to *embracing*, since the commands of Christ often interfere with man’s worldly interest, I see what sort of faith he has by observing which of the two he embraces. The Patriarchs embraced the promises of a future life by becoming strangers on the earth.—But all coming, &c. not influenced by faith, or supposed to make part of justifying faith, is undoubtedly self-righteous.

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5. As to the doubts and fears of serious persons, the question may receive different answers according to the scene where the question is laid. If it respect people, whose profession of Christianity is formed under a perverted gospel, or where the command to believe is conceived as some law of works, then I apprehend that the more hardened and self-confident will always enjoy greatest ease and security, while the most serious will be tormented with the most disquieting fears. For the latter, not having their consciences seared with self-conceit, like the former, must be greatly perplexed with fear, lest they have not acted their part in believing in a right and proper manner, and withal be wearied with fruitless endeavours to perform it better. If the question respect those who have been enabled to profess the faith preached by the Apostles, then such doubts and fears as prevail against hope must be considered as owing to some self-righteous entanglement, some mistake about the truth, some worldly lust, or affection opposite to charity, entertained and indulged. And the persons thus affected must be instructed and admonished accordingly. For we are told, that one may err from the truth, and yet be converted or brought again to the truth, and so his soul saved from death. But while men keep sight of the encouraging truth, all the fears they can have about their state will not prevail against their hope: but rather, while they serve as a check to self-confidence, and a spur to diligence in the labour of love, will contribute towards the increase of hope. Besides, it must be remembered, that the peace Christ gives his people does not issue in worldly quiet or tranquility, or in heightning their relish for this mortal life. It is peace in the midst of tribulation; joy in the midst of many temptations; a *course* of relief from fear, and connected all along with groaning for deliverance.—The

chief significancy of the question in hand, I apprehend lies in its reference to practical use. For as to God, his foundation standeth sure, he knoweth them that are his; he puts his fear in their hearts, so that however far they may go astray, they shall not utterly depart from him; he knows how to recover them from all their backslidings, and to preserve them to his heavenly kingdom. But as for us, we know one another only by appearances, and are directed by a law to vary our judgment and conduct toward each other according as these vary. Therefore, as to most of the cases on which the question is commonly moved, What method is a believer to take to get his doubts resolved? I apprehend it would be far safest to help him to an end of his doubts, by endeavouring to convince him that he is no believer: for if I still indulge him in the thought that he is a believer, while he is not comforted by the gospel, I set aside the only source whence I could safely speak comfort to him.

6. As to my notion of inherent grace, &c. I apprehend that only they who know the gracious work finished on the cross to be all sufficient for their justification; that only they, I say, know the true grace of God; and they, only they, are taught to love and imitate it. This knowledge or faith working by love is the new creature. Grace then appearing in any man is no other than the divine grace reported to him, reflected on his heart and life. So far as any man loves that grace, which is ever hateful to the world, so far he is holy, so far the Grace of God dwells in him. And it may be safely said to all who have made the Christian profession; "Let that therefore abide in you which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue

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“continue in the Son and in the Father.” And we may hold it as the essential difference betwixt the children of God and the children of the wicked one, that the former shall never be left to sin unto death, because the seed of God, or the word of God, abideth in them.—But, as I said before, we are to be guided in our judgment by appearances. And in general it is far safer to lead professors often to examine themselves if they be in the faith; than to encourage the thought we are too ready to entertain, that we are true believers, or that our state is at bottom safe and good.

7. As the last question, about recommending human writings to persons concerned about religion, leads us somewhat aside from the Scripture to private judgment and opinion; it goes *so* far beyond what I proposed at the beginning. Yet we may learn some useful hints in the general, about this from the Scripture. It appears not only from what the spirit of prophecy foresaw, but from what happened under the very eyes of the Apostles, that Paul had great reason to leave this injunction, “Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me.”—As we have none since the Apostles, whom God hath openly sustained as faithful declarers of his mind; it is evident that all human writings ought to be read with a jealous eye, especially on the matter of acceptance with God, where all men are so ready to deceive both themselves and others.—Besides, if we take but a slight view of the New Testament, the nature of Christ’s kingdom, and his prediction that his gospel would be hated by *all nations*, we may easily perceive that when a *nation* becomes *Christian*, the gospel must be greatly corrupted: consequently the great majority of religious books in that nation, particularly those most recommended, must be some way adapted to that corruption.

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But this is not all; those books are respected more than the Scripture; the people tremble at the thought of entertaining any sense of a passage of Scripture, that might discredit the names they are used to hold sacred. And their leaders choose to have it so. The interest of religion is concerned! What shall one do in this case, who would open his mouth for *Paul's* gospel? Shall he seek to repel one human authority by another? Perhaps he approves a few neglected treatises writ by nameless men like himself. Shall he seek to recommend these in common form? How absurd the attempt in various respects!—Shall he then do his best to provoke an appeal to the Scripture? Why, if he do this in the face of the public, he must write, he must print, and then his thoughts become a book; and then he may expect that every superficial reader shall stare him in the face, and say, Who made you wiser than all the world? Must we throw aside all our books to give place to yours? What can move you to despise so many great men, but envy of their reputation, and that you would have the respects paid to them all concentrated in yourself?—With many other little thread-bare sayings, repeated in every age, to brow-beat every one who shews his face for despised truth.—Yet I have some where in my printed Letters shewn a warm side to some human writings of small note; and it gives me some satisfaction to find I have done it so modestly as to escape your notice.

Having now considered your seven questions, and answered them the best way I could, it is time now, on this second exchange of letters, to enquire, To what purpose this laboured correspondence? Or, what ground is there to hope it may be mutually useful? You have already determined yourself about the *spirit* of my book; and can,

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like the bulk of my readers, remark upon that with great ease; while yet you abound with questions about the doctrine contained in it. And after these are answered, I have some intimation that there are more preparing for me. All the while you are disposed to signify some summary kind of agreement with me, but at the same time such an agreement as will comprehend me and those I most keenly oppose.

By your first Letter, I conceived some notion of your openness from the variety of particulars you informed me of. And I was accordingly forward to signify as much, as being fond to entertain the best notion of a new correspondent. But when I compare both your Letters together, and observe the same questioning humour, and the same disposition to summary agreement, after all I have said, still continuing: that notion greatly fails me. I remember the suspicion hinted in your first, that I strained the doctrines of grace to such a height, as to render them ridiculous: yet I am solicited to think, that you and I, and my principal antagonists, are all along, in the general, agreed about grace, though we may differ in some particular ways of speaking. And I must be solicited to think thus, on the one hand, by receiving the compliment that I often express myself more distinctly and less exceptionably than many of them; and, on the other, by a kind of threatening to find me guilty of the like charge I have laid on them. What shall be done to ward off this blow? Shall I see to do it by composition, and peaceably allow the truth to be handled at discretion, that they and I may enjoy together, in friendly alliance, the character of good and pious men? What would that charity, which rejoiceth with the truth, advise in this case? I apprehend it would remonstrate in the spirit of
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that maternal tenderness once expressed in the presence of *Solomon*, though the claimants on both sides should be found liars, *Let the truth live; at no rate let the truth be hurt or divided.* Or, in the spirit and temper of *Paul*, *Let God be true, and every man a liar.*

Since I published my book, I have been frequently reminded of a remark made me about the time of publication, by one of my first readers. He told me, my way of writing could never serve to promote the interest of Religion. My answer then was; I knew not what he meant by the interest of Religion; but, as for my cause, I neither expected nor desired it should make a better appearance in the world, than it did at present. This closed our conversation. But, since that time, I have often thought there was a good deal of sense in his remark, especially as I found it coincided much with the general sense of the orthodox. It is, perhaps, not easy to ascertain the precise idea contained under that expression, *the interest of Religion*, and the rather as it has occasionally a more or less extensive meaning. However, they who use it most generally, understand each other pretty well. It would require some time and pains to describe the politics used by our gravest Christian leaders, to promote the interest of religion; yet one must be a great stranger to what passes in the religious world, if he is quite ignorant of them. I shall, however, take this opportunity of declaring concerning the eminent men whom I have censured, and to whom you would so fain reconcile me, that I make no doubt but they were men who were *sincerely* concerned about the interest of Religion, even as I think the *Pharisees* and *Judaizers* also were. Nor can I account for your zeal to reconcile me to the former, upon any other foot than your concern about that same interest.

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What leads me the rather to think thus, is, that it appears to me from your questions and remarks, that you have read my book very superficially, especially as to what regards my capital point. I cannot well account for this, but by supposing that your attention was so much startled and engrossed by the passages that more immediately affected the interest of Religion, that you had little to bestow on what concerned the despised truth.—And if I should undertake to write my book over and over again, according to the order wherein your questions may lead me, I might procure myself abundance of labour, without knowing well to what purpose. Besides, I apprehend that a third person reading the short progress of our correspondence, would be at no loss to see that there is at bottom such a difference betwixt us, as to the aspect the gospel bears toward the honour of God on the one hand, and that of men on the other, or, as to the contrast, it forms betwixt the spirit of the world and that of God; that of necessity our mutual reasonings must *apparently fail* of their intended weight in the sight of each other.

You signify you are in no haste for my reply to what you have said on the spirit of my book, but would leave it in the mean time to my serious perusal. But why should I once bestow a serious thought on such a reflexion as the following?
 “ If we should attend to and comply with the
 “ spirit that runs through your Letters in this
 “ regard, [to wit, in giving characters of books]
 “ we should be out of conceit with all human
 “ writings, excepting your own.”—Your reflections also about contempt and envy (whatever I be) discover so little attention to the New Testament, the nature of Christ’s kingdom, and the very surface or outside of my controversy,

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fy, that I think it needless to take further notice of them.

But the passages of Scripture you refer me to, deserve a serious regard. To the first then, *Matt. vii. Judge not, &c.* I answer, it is written again in the same chapter, *Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheeps clothing:—Ye shall know them by their fruits.* To the other passage, “In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves, “if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;” I need only add the rest of the sentence, “and that “they may recover themselves out of the snare “of the devil, who are taken captive by him at “his will.” I am afraid this very lesson of meekness would not appear meek enough to many with whom I have to deal, if they were to be reminded of their danger accordingly. Yet if a jury of common beggars and dying criminals were to give their verdict on the spirit of my book, I dare say they would pronounce it full as meek, as that of my opponents. As for those who, solemnly raising themselves on their tip-toes, seriously insist on being thought so much taller than their neighbours, I have no notion of fawning upon them by any *soft Charientismus*. I cannot even understand the most inviting and encouraging sayings pronounced by the prime pattern of meekness, and with which the hope and comfort of the guilty is most intimately concerned; unless I consider them as bearing a very satirical aspect on those who claim the first rank in point of character in the world: Such as this saying, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners “to repentance:” and that other, which speaks of “more joy being in heaven over one sinner “repenting, than over ninety and nine righteous “persons that need no repentance.”

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LETTER IV.

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Upon the whole, I plainly perceive, that unless some very considerable change befall either your mind or mine, the continuance of our correspondence, on this subject, must quickly issue in the most insipid and the most trifling kind of altercation.

I am your's, &c.

R. S.

April 4, 1758.

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LETTER V.

S. P. to R. S.

S I R,

AS you despair of any real usefulness arising from our present correspondence, it should have dropped here ; were it not that I am conscious, your opinion arises from a mistake about your correspondent. You conceive me as one so far removed from, or such a stranger to the leading sentiment in your performance, as to have no prospect of our coming to a cordial agreement about the very turning point on which you proceed throughout your Letters. But had you more closely attended to the expressions and spirit of the last paragraph in my last Letter, the mistake had been prevented. However, that is a matter of no great consequence, as it may so easily be rectified.—I heartily thank you for your replies to my seven queries : they have been (I trust) made truly instructing, confirming and refreshing to my soul. You well observe, “Here lies the “key of Christian knowledge, the comfortable “evidence of the simple truth, striking the conscience, and thereby giving that peace and rest, “that can be found no other way.” This (through special mercy) I have been led both to see and to feel. You have given a transcript of my experience, and that of many others in the experimental part of your answer to my second query. Tho’, when I wrote my last, my conceptions

ceptions were in some measure confused, which occasioned the queries; yet before yours came to hand, my mind was led to a more distinct apprehension and a more comfortable sense of the important and delightful subject. Give me leave therefore now to state the matter in my own language, founded upon the word of God, and confirmed by the experience of my own soul.—Your grand view I conceive to be this:

In the room of all previous qualifications, in the room of the faith of assurance, and in the room of all endeavours to exercise acts of faith in order to justification, you substitute the bare report of the Gospel believed in the conscience as alone sufficient truly to answer all those ends, both for peace and holiness, which have been proposed by the foregoing methods.—The gospel report, however expressed in those summaries of it which we find in various passages, amounts all to one and the same thing: whether it be, *That Jesus is the Christ, that God hath raised him from the dead, that there is salvation in no other, that he hath finished transgression, &c. that God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, &c. that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, that his righteousness is unto all and upon all them that believe without difference.* The sum and substance is this: that Jesus Christ stands forth in the Gospel as the *only, the compleat, and absolutely free Saviour of sinners as such*, by his perfect atonement and righteousness, made and wrought out for the vilest of sinners without any distinction. By this doctrine, all the differences that subsist between one man and another in opinion, are levelled; and nothing but the compleat work of Christ is proposed in the Gospel, as the proper matter of faith, the immediate ground of hope, and the true spring of love; and as such it is viewed and received in believing. The clearer, stronger, and purer views our souls

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have of the love of God in Christ to sinners *as such*, the more our consciences are pacified, our hopes enlivened, our love inflamed, our endeavours excited, upon purely evangelical principles.

The believing view of the perfection of Christ's work discharges the conscience from legal guilt, in as much as the soul now sees it has nothing to do, to obtain acceptance with God, or to make atonement: because all this is perfectly done already by Christ. The believing perception of this sets the person upon a level with his fellow-sinners, lets him see the utter impossibility of acceptance with God upon any other foundation, makes him willingly despair of himself and truly thankful for that hope, that *general* free hope, which is held forth in the Gospel. Now the person loves Christ, or God in Christ, with a pure evangelical affection, and can now rejoice, that he has nothing to do towards his peace with God, that he is saved from all this self-righteous labour and toil, and has such a glorious compleat object of hope and love presented in the Gospel. By this belief the Soul is so humbled in the dust, as to perceive, that not only all his former *sins*, but all his self-righteous *duties* too were an abomination to the Lord. The believer seeing himself in this helpless, hopeless, desperate condition, can love and praise God in Christ, purely for this compleat redemption, and the hope arising thence to sinners, among which he esteems himself *chief*. He now sees an unchanging ground of hope, a most cogent motive to love and obedience, in that very truth which stands clear and firm in the Bible, without any regard to any preparations, qualifications, endeavours, or attainments of his own.

'Tis true, in this case there may and does remain a doubt concerning the person's own Interest in Christ; but the conscience being pacified, self-righteous labour spared, and a ground of hope and

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love perceived; the believer *acquiesces* in God's appointed way of making his calling and election sure, by bringing forth the fruits of this faith, hope and love. And when any thing appears defective in the affection and Conduct which becomes matter for doubting and lamentation, he is now led to look back to the love of Christ towards sinners as such, in order to kindle that love and excite those endeavours, which contain the evidence of an interest in Christ.

Having nothing to do, towards pacifying his conscience or procuring his acceptance, his chief concern is, from a love to the atonement, to give diligence unto the full assurance of hope to the end. Whereas, until this be perceived, there is nothing but legal duties and slavish fears, or a stupid insensibility. But by the perception of the gospel truth in the conscience, all false lights are extinguished, and the true light now shineth: all false hopes and legal fears are done away; while only that sort of fear, and that sort of hope remain, as will do the soul real good, and ascribe all the glory to God. Hence spring all the exercises of godliness, by a sight of God's perfect sovereign love; and all the affections of true humanity, by a sight of our equality with all others in the presence of God. This faith working by love, gives rise to all those motions of heart towards God in Christ, which are generally called *acts of faith*, looking, trusting, receiving, embracing, &c. and it gives spiritual life in the duties of meditation and prayer. 'Tis true, these very actings, if performed in order to justification, or under a notion of doing or attempting any thing to bring us nearer to God's acceptance, are formed upon a wrong plan. They are, or should be, only expressions of our knowledge of, rest in, and love to the Lord Jesus, as one who has finished salvation for poor helpless sinners. And these motions

tions of the believing soul may rather be considered as actings of *love*, than as any part of our justifying faith. If indeed a person imagines that these or any other exercises, are required of him as contributing to make his peace with God, he will be for exerting these acts *for that end*; and so the motions of his soul become more or less legal, although they have Christ and his righteousness for their object. But if a person in his conscience is clearly persuaded to the contrary of this: then he will receive his peace from, and kindle his love by a view of the free-grace truth as it stands in the Gospel, and will exercise these acts of *looking, resting, flying, &c.* in a way of meditation and prayer, in order to enliven his love, quicken his obedience, crucify his corruptions, and to mortify that natural pride which is as a worm at the root of all true godliness and humanity. This is what I conceive to be, a living by faith on the Son of God.

Thus by believing views of his compleat and finished redemption, I desire to be deriving strength and grace from Christ, to go on in the ways of the Lord, and in the Duties of love: at the same time looking on myself as upon a level with the vilest sinners, having no more love or holiness than what I derive from Christ by believing views of that truth, which respects all sinners as equally worthless and helpless. Thus it comes to pass, that the more I behold and live upon this pure and perfect love of Christ, still the more I perceive my corruption, helplessness and guilt, as separate from Christ. On the other hand, the more I perceive of my own corruption, guilt, and weakness, in this gospel light, still the more I learn to esteem that righteousness which is unto all and upon all them that believe without any difference. Being thus directed by the Lord, the Spirit, into the love of God and the patience of Christ,

Christ, the believer hopes to have his evidences more and more cleared up, and his doubts more and more cleared away, until his joy be made full. Oh! that we could have our eyes and hearts more strongly and constantly fixed upon the pure and perfect love of Christ towards sinners as such: how should we then be quickened to and strengthened for all the duties of holy obedience; and how would our souls be enlarged to mount up as on Eagles wings, &c.

Now then let me take a little view of the distinction between faith as *justifying* and as *sanctifying*. This faith, or this pure view of the perfect righteousness and compleat purchase of Christ for sinners of the human race, appears to be, in reality, the first spring of hope, love, and holiness. But if we consider it as *justifying*, we must separate it in our thoughts from all its effects, fruits and actings; for these belong to our conformity to God and our spiritual communion with him; and not to our justification before him. So then true faith, as *justifying*, is purely this perception of the divine righteousness of Christ in the mind and conscience: while the scripture declares that to *every one that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness*. In and by this affirmation of scripture, the believer is justified: being thereby declared or pronounced righteous for the sake of what he believes. But then it is evident, that if this persuasion does not produce these or the like effects, it is a dead faith. So that we may affirm these two things. (1.) That no faith truly justifies, but that which sanctifies, and *vice versa*. (2.) No faith truly sanctifies, but that which justifies. I say, (1.) No faith truly justifies, but that which sanctifies: whereby I mean, Whatever profession a person makes, or whatever notions he appears to entertain, yet if he be not induced

induced thereby to corresponding love and obedience, it is plain there is some defect, mixture, mistake, or reserve in his faith, which renders it abortive. (2.) No faith truly sanctifies, but that which justifies: I mean, No sort of faith or persuasion in the conscience, but that which beholds Christ alone as the ground of our acceptance with God, can ever purify the affections or regulate the conduct aright.

The Phrase which frequently occurs throughout your letters, and in which your whole doctrine seems to center; namely, that justifying faith is a *bare* belief of the *bare* report of the Gospel (or conceived in words akin to these;) this phrase, I say, sounds very uncouth to our ears, and appears very offensive and dangerous. For it conveys an idea to many, as if you meant no more nor other by it, than what is commonly called a speculative, notional, or dead faith. But I apprehend the phrase may bear a sound and safe interpretation, and that your reason for using it, is to exclude all mixture in the matter of justification: for, if I mistake not, your meaning is this: (1.) That in the affair of justification, 'tis only the *bare report* concerning Christ's work, which a justifying faith perceives the evidence, excellency, and efficacy of. So that the Soul, in believing has its eye only upon this glorious enlivening truth; or, which is the same, upon the perfect righteousness of Christ revealed therein. The believing thoughts of the mind are occupied about this alone, without seeing its own personal interest on the one hand, or any qualification in its favour on the other. But the faith or belief is fixed alone upon the compleat righteousness of Christ, as that which renders it possible for God to be fully just in justifying the sinner, ungodly as he stands. (2.) 'Tis a *bare belief* of this report that is justifying: because nothing that precedes this

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this belief, has any share in our justification: so far from it, that until a person is brought to apprehend this for truth in his conscience, all his convictions and attempts are legal, or of a self-righteous stamp. And whatever motions of heart or acts of obedience follow upon, or arise from the view of this blessed truth, they all belong to the affair of sanctification; neither are they to be conceived as any part of our justifying faith, or to be attempted by us in order to our justification. But yet, this bare belief of this bare report, if real or genuine, is in fact the true, the only, and the effectual spring of all that humility, love, desire, gratitude and obedience, which evidence the truth of our faith, and so prove our personal interest in the justifying righteousness. Now because we are naturally prone to mix something with Christ's righteousness in the ground of our hope, and to mix something with our faith, besides the direct and enlivening view of this only perfect righteousness, this is one reason, among many others, why it must be a special work to God, the Spirit, to give the soul this unmixed revelation of Christ: and one great reason why the faith of many proves insufficient, both for their pacification and purification, is because there is some mixture or mistake in their faith. Whereas this pure view of Christ's righteousness, as it appears by the Gospel, is a sufficient foundation for answering all the purposes of true consolation and sanctification. True believers never find themselves more comfortable in their souls, more inflamed with love, more humble in their hearts, or more ready to every good word and work, than when their attention is drawn to and fixed upon this pure love and perfect work of Christ in a realizing and heart-affecting manner.

Thus, Sir, I have laid before you a distinct and comprehensive view in brief, of what I look upon

upon to be the grand central design of your performance. In this light I understand it, in this light I approve it, and am thankful for it, because it has been a happy means, under the operations of the blessed Spirit, of confirming my faith, of clearing my views, of relieving my mind, comforting my heart, and enlivening my love. But, notwithstanding this comfortable turn in my experience now; yet, I am persuaded, that I have truly known and preached, trusted and loved the Lord Jesus Christ for many years. And you will easily apprehend, that, for this reason, among others, I cannot join with you in the severity of your sentiments concerning those you call popular preachers, and their writings. However, 'tis a piece of justice due to you, that you should be informed, how several of my friends, understanding the scope of your Letters in the above light, have received much peace and satisfaction into their souls, being now enabled to rejoice in the pure light of gospel truth. They join with me in expressing much thankfulness for the spiritual benefit accruing to their souls, through this unexpected medium. We can, with cheerfulness, congratulate each other in that peace, comfort, and love, which arises in our souls by the realizing perception of the pure truth, whereby we are in some happy measure set free from those self-righteous entanglements, those gloomy fears, and those slavish attempts, by which we had been perplexed and retarded in our way to Zion: and trust we shall be directed and quickened by the Spirit to abide by the truth, and to bring forth the proper fruits thereof in our hearts and lives.

But I am obliged to add, that even those who see with evidence and pleasure, what you have aimed to bring forth to open view, could heartily wish you had taken another, a softer method, in removing out of the way what has tended to per-

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vert or obscure the truth. And however we approve of the *matter* of your performance, yet the spirit of it is still really disgusting, as beyond measure severe and censorious.

However, 'tis some satisfaction to me, that I find by your last Letter, you make no doubt but the eminent men you oppose, were *sincerely* concerned about the interest of religion: although you still persist in classing them with *Pharisees* and *Judaizers*. I sincerely wish I could reconcile this *very confession* with all the keenness of your language in your Letters. But this, I apprehend, cannot easily be done: while charity inclines me to judge in your favour upon this head.

You apprehend my attention was so startled and ingrossed by the keenness of your language, as to draw off my mind from the main purport and drift of your piece. But this, I imagine, you now perceive to be a mistake: yet, it is certain, that it has had, and still has, this unhappy influence upon many of your readers, and I conceive you cannot be justified in laying such a strong temptation in their way.

As I openly espouse the leading sentiments and principal scope of your work, I have your severities continually cast in my teeth; so that my character does in some measure stand connected with yours. And sometimes I know not well what to reply, when I hear you charged with injustice towards others, and with the appearance of a supercilious pride and contempt of others. But then I consider again, that the Gospel is not to stand or fall with the character or reputation of any man. Notwithstanding this unhappy circumstance attending my attachment to the grand point in view, yet I trust this will not cool my courage nor damp my zeal for the precious truth, which lies so close to the foundation of true holiness and true consolation. And there are some circum-

circumstances that may be esteemed a sufficient counterbalance to this disadvantage: for I find some of those, who cannot relish your piece, or have a very favourable opinion of your character, to be possessed of precisely the same kind of faith, hope, peace, and love, which you aim to promote: while others, upon the proposal of the truth in its simple form, without any relation to your work, are enabled to take in the refreshing, confirming influence of it, whereby their darkness begins to scatter and their legal doubts to subside.

You justly observe, that it would produce the most fruitless and insipid altercation, to carry on a controversial correspondence about the characters of men and their writings: I shall therefore drop this part of the subject for the future, having already discharged my conscience in this regard, by what I have already written to you. If there be any question of importance remaining to be debated between us, it would be this: Whether a person, who believes the doctrine of atonement, &c. cannot be a true Christian, unless he be free from every degree of legality in his sentiments, expressions, and experience? as likewise, Whether a minister, who preaches the Deity and atonement of Christ, &c. may not be owned and esteemed as a preacher of the Gospel, and as truly useful to souls, although he be far from clear of such inconsistencies and improprieties in his addresses, as you have so severely exposed? For my part, I am obliged, from *reason*, from *scripture*, from *conscience*, and from *experience*, to give this question an answer in the affirmative. And here I leave it.

Permit me to add one thing farther, as the close of this Letter; and that is, to request an answer to a query or two more. You have been very obliging.

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obliging in making such a distinct reply to my former ones: and I hope your readiness to give satisfaction to a serious enquirer, and your willingness to do service in your generation, will induce you to be as full and clear in your reply as you can. 'Tis upon a subject about which many have been perplexed, and which every distinct party almost conceives in some different light.

What conceptions do you form under that scripture phrase, *the two covenants*, or *the old and the new covenant*? You have just hinted your dislike of apprehending them to be two dispensations of the same covenant of grace; but have not cleared up this matter. If they were really and properly two distinct covenants, one would imagine they must intend what is commonly called the covenants of *works* and of *grace*; or, in scripture language, the *law of works*, and the *law of faith*. If so, it would then follow, that all the Old Testament saints were under the former, and only the New Testament saints under the latter.

I farther conjecture, that this affair of the two covenants has some connection, in your mind, with your glosses upon the xviiith Chapter of *Ezekiel*, which have confused many. I am persuaded Mr. *Brine* has quite misunderstood you upon this head: and yet you sometimes speak so solemnly and seriously upon that act of divine condescension as if there was something more couched under it, than merely such a sarcastical address as was made by Christ, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*. Be so kind as to explain yourself more fully on these two points, and if your answers hereto prove as satisfactory upon the whole as your last replies, I shall be laid under fresh and great obligations to you.

I have now, without any reserve, opened my heart to you: and would flatter myself, that what I have now written, will prove at least sufficient to encourage you to continue the correspondence; especially as we both rejoice in the comfortable evidence of the simple truth.

I rest yours, &c.

S. P.

May 20, 1758.

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LETTER VI.

R. S. to S. P.

SIR,

THE account you have given me of your faith and experience, naturally leads me to use a closer kind of freedom with you, than was necessary, while the question turned upon general truths of common concern to men. Or, I am now led to consider the interesting subject of common concern, as exhibited or exemplified in the particular case of you and your friends. I ought to be in readiness to satisfy the remotest stranger desiring to know my views of the truth of the Gospel; but I cannot judge of particular men as Christians or faithful, without enquiring, who they are, and what is their leading purpose?

At the close of your profession of faith, and after declaring your apprehension of the scope of my book, you are pleased to say, that the account of the Christian doctrine there given has been made useful for confirming your faith, clearing your views, relieving your mind, comforting your heart, and enlivening your love. "But, notwithstanding this comfortable turn in my experience now, yet I am persuaded that I have truly known and preached, trusted, and loved the Lord Jesus Christ for many years. And you will easily apprehend, that for this reason among others, I cannot join with you in the severity of your sentiments concerning those you call popular preachers, and their writings, &c." This, in substance you represent as the

common case of yourself, and several of your friends. For you add, that several of them
 “ have received much peace and satisfaction into
 “ their souls, being now enabled to rejoice in the
 “ pure light of gospel truth.” And, “ We can,
 “ with chearfulness, congratulate each other in
 “ that peace, comfort, and love, that arises in
 “ our souls by the realizing perception of the
 “ pure truth, whereby we are in some happy
 “ measure set free from those self-righteous en-
 “ tanglements, those gloomy fears, and those
 “ slavish attempts, by which we had been per-
 “ plexed and retarded in our way to *Zion*; and
 “ trust we shall be directed and quickened by the
 “ Spirit to abide by the truth, and to bring
 “ forth the proper fruits thereof in our hearts
 “ and lives.”

Now in remarking on this, as connected with other passages, I would lay before you these considerations in the following sections:

1. That no man can be delivered from an error about the truth, or a mistake about acceptance with God, but in the way of repentance and conviction of former hypocrisy. The case is very different from that of philosophers, who in all their various mazes still consider one another as conducted by the sincere love of some phantom, whereof they have no idea, but to which, in compliment to each other, they have chosen to give the name of Truth. The pure light of the saving truth no sooner shines into a man's heart than it convinces him, that the reason of his not perceiving it before was his loving darkness rather than the light. For all things that are reprov'd, are made manifest by the light; for whatsoever doth make manifest, is light.

2. We cannot be assured that we love Christ, and are accordingly interested in him, by reflecting on any mere thoughts or motions of our hearts concerning

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concerning him. Yea, we cannot be assured that we have known him, or understood the genuine truth concerning him; unless that truth has produced its proper fruits in our hearts and lives. Our love to Christ must be tried by our regard to his new commandment; by our love to the uncorrupted Gospel, and them that believe it for the truth's sake dwelling in them. This love then, considering how the world stands affected to the simple truth, obliges a man immediately to take aside; it engages him in a controversy of the most interesting nature, even against those whose good graces he would otherwise value most. *Jude*, when his heart was big with concern about the common salvation, exhorts to an earnest contention for the faith once delivered to the Saints. Yea *Paul*, describing a conversation becoming the Gospel, makes it chiefly to consist in this sort of strife and contention. "Only, says he, let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ,—that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries,—having the same conflict which ye saw in me and now hear to be in me." Moreover how can the Christian brotherly love be exercised, but where there is a Christian brotherhood, or an union of men cemented only by the simple truth, in separation from all others? Now if you and your friends have not formerly been united simply upon the truth, in distinction from all others, how can it appear to your consciences that you have formerly loved Christ? It ought to be remembered that *Paul* restricts the blessing in this manner, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ (*καὶ ἀγαποῦσι*) in incorruption." For the knowledge of Christ was greatly corrupted by many even in *Paul's* time, and that

that by as plausible and respectable pretences as can be used by any in our time.

3. All who know and love Christ as the end of the law for righteousness, are sensible of a strong bias daily working in their hearts in opposition to the revealed righteousness, and prompting them to establish their own. Yea, the more they love Christ, the more sensible they are of the force of this bias, and its bad effects upon them. On this account they daily find need to ask the remission of sin. In distinction from every other weight or worldly lust which retards their course, they find this to be (*εὐπρεπὴς ἀνάγκη*) the sin that fits very close to them. They find this to be the chief thing that can properly be called *inherent* in them, as having the deepest root in their very frame and constitution: yea, with *Paul* they find this evil present with them, even when they would do good. Whereas, to rejoice before God in the work finished by Christ is altogether supernatural, and quite foreign to the course of our thoughts and reasonings. In corresponding with God by the prayer of faith, they find relief from the guilt and power of this evil, and are encouraged with the hope of complete victory and deliverance at last. As they cannot then see room for the question, Whether a *true Christian* be free from every degree of legality, or self-righteousness in his experience? far less can they see cause to put *sentiments* and *expressions* adopted in defence of self-righteousness, on a footing with the Christian experience on that point. If we are not sensible of the damning nature of that principle, as indulged in ourselves, or more explicitly avowed by others, we cannot be said to know and love Christ.

4. It is very well reasoned, that we cannot, with a good grace, condemn others in that respect wherein we approve of ourselves. If we can
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be relieved from mistakes about acceptance with God, and come to settlement in our minds about the truth of the Gospel, without being convinced, that till then we loved darkness rather than the light; no doubt we must have a friendly fellow-feeling with all seriously disposed persons, who are joining their best endeavours to Christ's righteousness, in order to peace in their consciences. Judging of them by our own rule, we will consider them all the while as well-meaning persons and sincere lovers of Christ. Our friendship with the self-righteous world, will hold pace with our self-indulgence on that point.—On the other hand, if when the light of the truth awakened us, we behold the divine judgment pointed in the most awful manner against what we most valued ourselves for before; we will be ready, for the love we bear to the truth, and for the benefit of others, to express our sense of that judgment, to prevent, if possible, their going down to the grave with a lie in their right-hand. Moreover, we cannot continue to keep the truth any longer than we retain the sense of that judgment, as a check on the remaining disposition to establish our own righteousness. And our self-condemnation, in this respect, will naturally hold pace with the mutual antipathy betwixt the world and us about righteousness. They, indeed, who have obtained their faith without being greatly alarmed with the evil of that disposition, may continue to profess it without being very sensible of the remaining force and guilt of their self-righteous pride, and without giving great offence to the devout world. But these circumstances ought to suggest a strong suspicion that they have not obtained equally precious faith with the Apostles.

5. To be convinced of the evil of self-righteousness, the true root of all unbelief, is a conviction quite supernatural. The conviction of every other

other sin may be admitted by the natural conscience, or by those who believe not the Gospel. Yea, the conviction of every other sin may very well consist with the prevailing avowed desire to establish our own righteousness. For, when a man is convinced of other sins, what refuge can his thoughts suggest to him for relief, but some attempt to do better? Accordingly, when Christ was ready to leave the world, and his disciples were discouraged at the thoughts of executing their commission, considering the obstacles they had to cope with in the hearts of men; he tells them that the Spirit of truth, whom he would send them as their comforter, would convince the world of sin, because they believed not on him.—Self-righteousness is the great vail drawn over the hearts of men, shutting them up, and hardening them in unbelief. And it requires the most awful apprehension of the divine judgment exhibited by the Gospel, yea, the terror of the Lord (as *Paul*, in a conspicuous manner, experienced) to rend aside this vail, that the truth may find admittance into their hearts. What then shall we think of people acquainting us of the removal of what *tended to obscure the truth* to them, and yet grudging that this removal was not accomplished after a *softer method*?

6. Let us now consider more particularly the question formerly referred to; “Whether a person, who believes the doctrine of atonement, &c. cannot be a true Christian, unless he be free from every degree of legality in his sentiments, expressions, and experience?” That true Christians need repentance and remission of sin daily, for what they feel of legality or self-righteousness in their experience, has been already noted. On the other hand, that such as give place to any degree of self-righteousness in their avowed sentiments and expressions, are true Christians,

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istians, I am well authoris'd to deny. Here then lies the difference between true and false Christians, as to the former, *what they do* in the self-righteous way, *they allow not*; but, on that account, see themselves sinners, and are relieved only by that mercy revealed for the help of the ungodly. Whereas, the latter deliberately approve of some self-righteous mixture with the truth: and instead of admitting the conviction of sin on this account, most of them are ready with open mouth to contend for the expediency of such mixture, and to make it, with its influence on the heart and life, the very hinge of that esteem they give and expect from each other. All the while I deny not that a man, apparently blameless in the Christian profession, may yet be a hyppocrite: but we can judge of men only by their words and actions.

7. On the twofold aspect of the above question, which, at the close of your paragraph, receives a general answer in the affirmative. I would observe; that while it blends the Christian experience about self-righteousness, together with sentiments approving it, or expressions uttered in its defence, and pleading its cause, it discovers, on the one hand a very lame notion of the evil of self-righteousness, as experienced by believers; and on the other, a great tenderness and sympathy for the self-righteous world. These things indeed go hand in hand together. Our regard to those who speak in behalf of self-righteousness, must hold pace with our own sense of guilt in that respect. In the churches with us, none pretends to be free of sin in point of self-righteousness, yet we would readily agree to censure any man who would hold up his face to speak in its defence, in any degree, or under any pretence whatever.

8. The other branch of the question runs thus:
 "Whether a minister, who preaches the Deity
 "and atonement of Christ, &c. may not be
 "owned

“owned and esteemed as a preacher of the gospel
 “and as truly useful to souls, although he be
 “far from clear of such inconsistencies and im-
 “proprieties in his addresses, as you have so
 “severely exposed?” To which follows the
 common answer to both branches of the question.

—“For my part, I am obliged, from *reason*,
 “from *scripture*, from *conscience*, and from ex-
 “*perience*, to give this question an answer in the
 affirmative. And here I leave it.” Here I would
 first inquire, What are we reasoning about all
 this while? Is it about the propriety of words and
 phrases, or the importance of things? If about
 the former, we have certainly trifled too long;
 if the latter, it is time for both of us, to know
 what side we ought to take. Surely no man's
 peace of mind needs to have any connection with
 my manner of expressing my notion of the Gospel.
 The choice of my words and phrases has been
 commonly suggested by those of the men I op-
 posed; and by my inclination to distinguish my
 meaning from theirs.—But any men may under-
 stand the gospel to every good purpose, without
 being acquainted with any of the phrases peculiar,
 either to any of them or to me. Yea, a man
 may have the saving knowledge of the truth, who
 does not always talk with propriety and con-
 sistency about it. But what is all this to the pur-
 pose? Have your friends been in some happy
 measure relieved in their minds, set free from self-
 righteous entanglements, gloomy fears, slavish
 attempts, &c. and all this by getting into a more
 proper and distinct way of talking upon a subject
 which they formerly loved from their hearts? If
 this be the case, it may well be said, that a small
 matter makes a very deep impression upon them.

—On the other hand, have our most respected
 preachers been always meaning well, yet so un-
 mindful of their subject when they wrote, that it

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will be difficult to find one among a thousand of their printed sermons where we shall perceive a bold and just account of the Apostolic doctrine, about what relieves the guilty conscience? Is there not some embarrassment in this constant plea about impropriety and inconsistency; Is there not some entanglement of the mind here? And shall I endeavour to point whence it arises.

9. In my former letter I gave you a hint about a concern for the interest of religion, contrasted with regard for the despised truth. That hint, I then thought, and still think, was far from being obscure. But, since, for reasons best known to yourself, you have thought fit to call it *a concession*, I am far from thinking it needs any. A minister in your situation has, I apprehend, a twofold interest in the religious way to consult. 1. He has measures to keep with his orthodox associates, or allies in the ministry, and the leading men of the dissenting interest. 2. He has likewise measures to keep with the serious professing people, more especially his own congregation and hearers. Either of these, I apprehend, is sufficient to blunt the edge of his jealousy for the despised truth of the gospel, and to incline him to relax his notions, in that respect, as much as possible. On this occasion I would say, that you had need to be well settled in your mind about the leading sentiments and principal scope of my book, before you suffer your character to stand in any measure connected with mine; as any such connection must prove dangerous to you. I would think it much more natural and safe for one in your situation, to clear yourself by giving broad hints, that the author of the obnoxious book was an enemy to holiness, or that you suspected he was at bottom no great friend to true piety. For I reckon the orthodox in *England* are much the same sort of men with those so accounted in *Scotland*;

land, who soon cried aloud, that that book served to overthrow all practical religion. I am pleased when I hear such remarks, because I thereby find I am understood according to expectation; and that the difference I was chiefly anxious to evince, is felt to be solid, substantial, and extensive; so far from lying in improprieties of expression, or even accidental inconsistencies, as many who incline to dissipate any controversy about the faith affect to think.

10. Were any small number with you, disposed heartily to put their hand to the plow, I apprehend, that turning their back upon all their present religious connections, they would imitate *Abraham*, who, led simply by the divine word, *went forth, not knowing whither he went*; and that espousing the choice of *Moses*, commended by *Paul*, they would freely risque all other considerations for the prospect connected with that choice. I apprehend, that having once *seen the Lord*, they would be ready to cry with *Peter*, If it be thou, bid us come unto thee *upon the water*. If, after setting out on such a call, their attention should be drawn away from him that called them, by the apparent importance of the connections they left, and new difficulties they had to struggle with; no doubt, they would, like *Peter* on seeing the wind boisterous, immediately *begin to sink*. And here appears the need for the constant care of *Israel*, to support his people by the interposition of his arm. For, as they begin their course, not prompted by their own wisdom, but led by his call, they must be taught to understand, that in every step of their progress without him they can do nothing.

11. However small some differences about faith, as exhibited in print, may appear to many readers; yet one thing is certain, that the joining of a seemingly very small impropriety with the

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the apostolic Gospel, will make the offence of the cross to cease; will make Christianity acceptable to thousands who would otherwise hate it; will secure the worldly ease and reputation of the teachers, and give full scope to the religious pride of the professing people. Whereas on the other hand, the zealous discarding of such impropriety, will render Christianity as despicable and hateful in the eyes of the religious world, as it was at the beginning. So that great things, no less than the most interesting objects of the passions of men, turn upon a seemingly very small matter here. Yea, I may add, greater things than these are here at stake, even the eternal concerns of men. For though the revelation of divine grace in the Scripture be in itself extremely simple, and fit to make even a child wise to salvation; yet the methods of undermining it, through the slight and cunning of men, are numerous and various. Hence the many calls to watchfulness; hence the exhortations, to strive to enter in at the strait gate,—to fight the good fight of faith, &c.—The simplicity of the Gospel is the great object of Christian watchfulness.—If people have once lost sight of *this*, it signifies very little, what they are zealous about.

12. An apparently small impropriety admitted into the scripture account of grace, renders it, in *Paul's* view, *no more grace*. The same thing may be said of faith, the atonement and the person of Christ.—*Paul's* rivals among the churches of *Galatia*, preached the Deity and atonement of Christ, &c. They were far from insinuating any other way of salvation. They only out-ran *Paul* somewhat in their concern about holiness. They wanted to guard his Gospel on that side where it appeared weakest. It grieved them to think that a scheme in itself so excellent, should in any respect lie open to the objections of those who thought that

the interests of true piety were not sufficiently secured by it. This defect they were willing to supply. And to this it would seem they were prompted by a sincere concern for the credit of Christianity, and the interest of religion in general.—The *Galatians* were caught. They began to think it in many respects expedient for their own advantage, and the honour of Christ, to consult the interest of religion likewise; agreeable to the newly proposed improvement of the Gospel.—But what says *Paul* to them? *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel!* Strange! How uncharitable to say, *another Gospel!* Considering how small the addition to the old received Gospel; and withal how necessary, how well divided, and how great the advantages arising from so small an addition! *Paul* explains himself—that by *another Gospel* he does not mean any formal rejection of the *received Gospel*, either in whole or in part; but such a perversion of that received one, by means of their plausible addition, as rendered it, in effect, another Gospel. And to deter men from all such tampering with the Gospel in time coming, he denounces the Judgment of God in the following awful manner, uttering it twice to command the greater attention. *But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel, than that which we have preached unto you, (or, καὶ ἐγὼ,) ought beyond what we preached) let him be accursed. As we said before so say I now again; If any preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.* Thus *Paul* decides the matter. And here I leave it.

From the considerations now laid before you, I am led to conclude, that there must be some defect or mistake in your faith. Otherwise, I had probably thought it captious to find fault with

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the profession you have now given me of it in the first eight pages of your letter. That mistake I cannot pretend clearly to point out, far less to remove. All that I can do is, to signify my suspicion on such passages or expressions as in my view afford most room for it.

What first and chiefly presents itself to my thoughts on this head then, is the difficulty your friends find in digesting my way of speaking about justifying faith, as "a bare belief of the bare report of the Gospel." As this phrase, though suggested to me by the necessity I found of distinguishing my meaning from that of others, appears to me to be well supported by the Scripture, I am far from being disposed to apologize for it, or to give any explanation that might render its aspect less uncouth. As to its reception with you, you tell me; "This phrase, I say, sounds very uncouth to our ears, and appears very offensive and dangerous: for it conveys an idea to many, as if you meant no more by it, than what is commonly called a speculative, notional, or dead faith." Then you proceed to explain to me so as to keep as near my meaning as possible, and at the same time to give my language a less obnoxious sound. Your explanation will indeed bear my meaning: but any attempt to render my language on this head less offensive, is enough to alarm me and awaken suspicion. It was my study to express myself so as, if possible, to offend all of the same stamp with those who were most offended at the Gospel from the beginning. Accordingly it gave me satisfaction, when I heard that my account of faith was esteemed by such people weak and insufficient; more especially when some alledged that I made nothing at all of faith. For my purpose was to transfer the whole stress commonly laid on *faith* to the bare *truth* concerning Christ crucified, so as

to understand by faith nothing more than the truth known or believed. In this view, all that is said of the efficacy of faith, in the matter of justification, must respect the truth or Christ crucified. Therefore, every epithet of efficacy or worth applied to *faith* in any distinction from *what is believed*, must either have no meaning, or it must have a bad one. For instance, if we should say, that a *justifying faith* perceives the evidence, excellency, and efficacy of the *bare report*; would not this seem to allow that *faith* has some agency or efficacy of its own, as distinguished from *what is believed*, whatever degree of efficacy be ascribed to the report believed? Would it not seem to allow, that we have some justifying principle fit to perceive and bring home the efficacy of the Gospel?

Those who stumble at the *bare belief of the truth*, would be justified by that in their faith, which distinguishes it from a *speculative, notional, or dead faith*; or in other words, they would be justified, partly at least, by the liveliness, heartiness, and sincerity of their faith. They cannot understand how the bare fact testified can furnish the answer of a good conscience before God, unless they at the same time find some reason to conclude, that there is some peculiarity in *their manner* of perceiving or apprehending it, by which they may be distinguished from others who do not *so* apprehend it. Let them only be indulged ever so little upon this point, and then they will allow it to be a thing quite natural and rational to be *justified by faith*; otherwise it must still appear to them a thing strange and unaccountable, and quite foreign to all their reasonings.—Yet if the ancient method of distinguishing a *living* from a *dead* faith, were to be urged upon these same very people, at the rate of their being held for hypocrites on their non-compliance; I dare say it would sound no less uncouth to their ears,

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ears, and appear no less offensive and dangerous, than to hear of justification taking place by the bare report of an event that happened before we were born.

The very inclination to apologize for the Christian faith, or to render it palatable to such people, must have a strong tendency to darken our own minds about it. For, considering them in a very different light from that wherein Christ and his Apostles viewed their predecessors, we suppose, on account of their professed zeal and habitual seriousness, that the interest of holiness is deeply at heart with them, and accordingly we must be greatly straitened how to account to them for the justification of the ungodly by *faith without works*.

As such people are not greatly straitened about the remission of sin, we are led in our doctrine about faith, instead of dwelling on the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to purge the guilty conscience; to insist upon faith as a lively principle in the heart of man, every way fit to improve us in goodness, and to carry forward all serious well disposed people in their advances toward holiness. We become loath to set forth without reserve the freedom of divine grace, ~~and~~ the great point that stands foremost and most conspicuous in the doctrine of faith, unless we at the same time caution our discourse, by declaring how necessary faith in the heart is to be a principle of holiness. — Yet, were it not deviating from the matter in hand, I might easily shew at length, that what is commonly reckoned *holiness* by devout people, is a thing as widely different from the *holiness of the truth*, as the *faith* taught in the New Testament is from *that* recommended in the *Marrow of modern divinity*.

Now while you are very careful to promise upon the head of the faith I contend for, that it

will produce obedience; I observe that at the same time you are inclined to honour our *view* or perception of Christ's righteousness with such epithets as would seem to give it some separate, distinguished, or concurring importance in the matter of our justification, or in quieting the guilty conscience. You seem inclined, I say, to dignify that *view* which pacifies the conscience, with such epithets as may distinguish it, at first instance, from a *notional dead faith*. To this account would seem to belong what you say of our pure views, realizing perception, and the attention being drawn to and fixed upon Christ in a realizing and heart affecting manner, with other like expressions.—Now the question about what relieves the guilty conscience is altogether a separate consideration from what distinguishes one professor from another, or one man's faith from that of another.—The guilty person finds relief by knowing Christ. He afterwards judges of his faith by surveying himself. Likewise, the teacher preaches relief to the guilty conscience by preaching Christ, and he judges of individuals by their fruits. In the former case, discarding all idle distinctions and questions about *how to believe*, his business is to shew the hearers *what to believe*, and upon what grounds. In the latter case, according as the fruits of the truth preached appear, he judges *who are believers*, what sort of faith each professor has obtained, where shines the excellency of one man's faith, and where lies the defect of another's: so, is able to talk to them intelligibly and pertinently about *how they believe*, as well as *what*; and to encourage, admonish, or rebuke accordingly. For though there is a real difference, at first instance, between the faith of a true believer, and that of a hypocrite; yet we are not allowed, nor have any rule whereby to judge of that difference, till the fruits appear.

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The first Disciples on being convinced of Christ's resurrection, *congratulated each other*, not on their manner of apprehending or their *realizing perception* of the truth, but on the appearance of the truth itself. They congratulated each other, saying, "The Lord is risen indeed."—And the Disciples were glad when they saw the Lord; even as *Simeon* before them was glad when he beheld him yet a child in his arms.—What I would have to be thought of here, is, that men professing the faith in the most unexceptionable words, may yet be found valuing themselves on the orthodoxy or soundness of their belief, and taking *that* instead of, or along with Christ's sacrifice, into the account of their justification or relief from the sense of guilt. Whereas, the truth reported *alone* makes men acceptable to God and heals the wounded conscience, even as it is the rain falling down from heaven that moistens the earth and refreshes the tender herb.

Instead of enlarging further on this head, I shall here give you a note of a Sermon I lately heard on these words in *John's* Gospel; "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another, &c." The preacher, after taking notice of the religious character for which the *Pharisees* respected each other, and also hoped that God would regard them, observed, that all religions, Jewish, Mahometan, or Christian, held their devotees in estimation;—that in Christian nations, where certain endeavours and feelings about believing, with the regular attendance on suitable exercises of devotion, took place of the antient faith and love, the devotees respected each other on much the same grounds as those of other religions.—That the modern mutual claim and grant of charity corresponded exactly with the antient exchange of honour mentioned in the text.—That the great reason why this exchange of honour

nour or charity hindered men from believing, and humanly speaking rendered it impossible for them to admit the saving truth, was, that it seared their consciences with a conceit of their excellency above other men before God, so rendered it impossible for them to admit the conviction of sin. —That the impossibility was fully as great here as that other mentioned by Jesus with respect to a rich man's entering into the kingdom of heaven. —But that what was impossible with men, was possible with God. —On this occasion he told us, he had frequently considered it as one of the most notable miracles that Jesus wrought; when, upon the *Pharisees* presenting the Adulteress to him, he shewed his divine authority over their conscience, commanding it to speak out, and obliging them to hearken to its language: and whereas they had approached him in the highest confidence of their excellency above the poor infamous woman, compelling them to retire, stung with shame and self-condemnation at the difference they had presumed to make. —He observed likewise, that in that very respect wherein mutual esteem ran highest, Jesus testified of the world that their works were evil, and was accordingly hated by them. —And that the very hinge of this mutual esteem, or in the words of Jesus, that which is highly esteemed among men, was an abomination in the sight of God.

To the note I have given of that Sermon, which drew my attention considerably, appearing to me highly agreeable to the text, I shall only add one reflection of my own, naturally resulting from it: —that among people zealous about *faith*, where the business of *believing* is their very righteousness, and where the great emulation is who shall be the most dexterous *believers*, it must be the hardest of all things to fasten a conviction of UNBELIEF.

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L E T T E R VI. 81

In reasoning about the antient Gospel, it is altogether vain to think of setting aside the consideration of what reception it obtains in the devout world: for do what we will, that consideration must always recur upon us at every step. Yea the contrast thereby formed seems to have been intended from the beginning, as a notable means for settling in the minds of them that believe a distinct notion of the saving truth, as well as giving trial of their love to it.——Whom say *men* that I am, said Jesus to his Disciples; and then, Whom say *ye* that I am? When *Simeon* beheld the Child Jesus as the divine salvation prepared before the face of all people, he beheld him at the same time as a sign that should be spoken against. So said the Prophet long before. He shall be for a sanctuary, but for a stone of stumbling. But not to multiply quotations where so many occur;—To whom coming, says *Peter*, as unto a living stone, *disfallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious*;—unto you *therefore* which believe, he is precious. We cannot have the proper value for Christ, unless his glory arise to our view from those very circumstances, on account of which he was chiefly despised and set at nought among men. And the same thing must be said of his Gospel to the end of the world. *Paul* gloried in the cross in that very respect wherein it broke all measures between the world and him.——No task can be more fruitless than any attempt to render the Gospel palatable to people who at bottom disallow it in its native simplicity. No task, I say, can be more embarrassing, more comfortless to the teacher; none less beneficial to the hearers.—I might say much the same of any attempt to draw the antient christian order over any society, whose union is not formed upon the truth. What would it avail, though all their usages and forms of worship corresponded to the practice of the first Churches?

Churches? Still it must be said, that nothing could be more ridiculous, nothing more absurd, than any attempt to practise the antient discipline in a society not formed upon the truth. Yet still it must be allowed, that the Christian faith and order correspond to each other like hand and glove, or sword and sheath; for while *Paul* beheld with joy the order of the *Colossians*, he beheld at the same time the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. —The result is, that with regard to antient Christianity, it would be prudent for one, first to count the cost well, and then, laying his hand to his heart, determine either to go forward at all hazards, or stop short betimes.

As this Letter has already swelled considerably, I must confine myself to a few general hints in answer to the questions proposed at the close of yours.—All the faithful before Christ were saved only by the new covenant to come.—They found salvation in the promise.—Neither the old covenant, which was made at *Sinai*, nor the blood by which it was ratified, nor its priesthood, sanctuary, inheritance, &c. could take away sin, or secure those who enjoyed those privileges from the wrath to come.—All these were only shadows of good things to come.—But I have the less occasion to dwell on this subject, as you may see it distinctly handled in a Book lately sent to one of your friends, called, *The Testimony of the King of Martyrs*, &c. particularly Chap. II. Sect. I.

As to the other branch of the question;—I am far from thinking that either Christ's address to the young Ruler, If thou wilt enter into life, &c. or the address to the *Jews* in *Ezekiel*. Chap. xxxiii. was in any degree farcassical. I look on them both to be fully as seriously direct and proper as the words of *Paul*, when he says, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Far be it! Yea we establish the law." We cannot

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not seriously maintain that death is the wages of sin, unless we at the same time with equal seriousness maintain that according to law, life is due to the obedient. Those who claim the rank of righteous persons that need no repentance, or who from any given period of their life have no more occasion to repent, may indeed find many things in Scripture more especially in the law itself, serving to invalidate and render their claim ridiculous. Yet still it must be seriously maintained, that if righteous men can be found, their title to life is unquestionably good. This is an important and necessary branch of doctrine. When men enquired, what they should do to enter into life, Christ in the most serious manner referred them to the divine law. The Gospel never says any thing to enervate a man's zeal for righteousness, who apprehends he is possessed of that zeal. They who are *willing* to obey, have all encouragement set before them to proceed. And men will always continue in some mistake about the inward disposition of their hearts, till upon the trial the law convince them that the great defect lies in their very *will*. It would be making void the law to tell men that however willing they may be to obey, it is impossible for them to succeed. It would be making it void, I say, in their minds, while they still suppose they have at bottom some right disposition, and desire only to be freed of certain obstacles and placed in proper circumstances for exercising that disposition in a becoming manner.—When we have duly considered this, we shall perceive a certain Majesty about the revelation of mercy, and its address to men, not commonly attended to. It looks shy and distant to the *well-disposed*, saying, *Let them alone*; while it solicits the attention of the wretched and the desperate with an aspect winning beyond imagination. In this view the history

tory of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels carries in it a grace and majesty altogether Divine.—I need only add, that God certainly knows best the fittest way of addressing men.

As these questions touch upon the leading lines of the scheme of revelation, a particular notice of them would lead on to various and extensive views of the Scripture. Mean time, in perusing, at your leisure, the fore-mentioned Treatise and other Tracts sent along with it, you may see the substance of what we have learned from the Scripture on these points.

To conclude, could I see or hear of a dozen of men in *London* united together only for so many months upon the simple truth of the Gospel, in opposition to every foreign connection, I would not be afraid of differing much with them as to their judgment of the temper and conduct of their devoutest neighbourhood. I would be disposed to refer the matter to their own experience.—Conclusions are most striking that arise from facts.—The difference of things is best seen upon the fullest and nearest contrast.—Experience we say teaches fools.

I am your's, &c.

June 29, 1758.

R. S.

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LETTER VII.

S. P. to R. S.

S I R,

THE farther our correspondence proceeds, the more clearly I am convinced, that we are perfectly agreed as to the capital point of enquiry. Upon the perusal of your Letter, I soon discerned that its design was, to search as closely and as faithfully as you could into the faith, hope, and experience of your correspondent and his friends: intimating all along, that there may be some essential flaw or capital defect in our faith. This, you have taken all possible pains to examine into and prove. Yet I would not have you imagine in the least, that it has raised any degree of resentment in my mind, to think that I should be suspected for a hypocrite after all my profession: for I am verily persuaded, you wrote in this strain, from a godly jealousy, lest our minds should have been or should remain to be corrupted, from the simplicity that is in Christ. I have indeed several exceptions to make to some of your thoughts and arguments: but as the greatest part of your distinctions and cautions, which are apparently nice, are notwithstanding solid, necessary, and useful; I see no great benefit would arise from a laboured reply; since every one is more ready to think *well* than *ill* of himself. I therefore wave the attempt, and shall aim to turn the currency of our correspondence into a more

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useful channel, dy desiring you to favour me with a more distinct account of the nature of that peace and satisfaction of mind which a believer enjoys upon his clear and distinct perception of the simple truth, previous to his being assured of his own personal interest. It is a subject which you and your friends are probably more acquainted with, both doctrinally and experimentally, than we are. You say in Page 11th of your printed Letters, "that if a person
 "slights the comfort arising from the bare truth,
 "he slights the bare work of Christ, and considers it as too narrow a foundation, whereon to
 "rest the whole weight of his acceptance with
 "God." I am clearly of your opinion herein, and find reason to be ashamed of myself, that I had been verily guilty of slighting and overlooking that comfort. But still this does not, and indeed cannot of itself give a person a full satisfaction concerning his own personal interest in Christ. This is a question that still remains undecided, and I am fully persuaded, that it cannot be scripturally decided, but by the appearance of some of the genuine fruits and effects of the pure truth upon the heart and life. Give me leave here to put some questions relative to this matter with freedom; without much regarding the order in which they should be properly placed.

Can a person, who really believes the truth, be easy and contented in his own mind and conscience, while this question concerning his own interest remains unresolved? or, indeed, ought he to be so? Or may not one who is brought to a belief of the truth, be immediately assured of his own interest; being persuaded in himself, that what he believes is the truth of the Gospel, and being conscious in his own mind, that he does believe it and feels some of the immediate effects thereof?

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If a person be conscious to himself, that his only entire hope is placed upon Christ for acceptance separate from every other consideration; may he not directly lay hold of the promise, that "He that believes shall be saved," or of that assertion, "He that believes is justified," and so take in this consideration to further the peace and tranquility of his own mind in pursuing the obedience of faith? Or at least, may he not entertain a very satisfying hope concerning his own interest, until he be left to commit or indulge some voluntary sin of omission or commission, whereby his peace is broken, the faith practically denied, and his own faith rendered suspicious?

Or is it necessary for a believer always to maintain or cultivate a suspicion whether he belongs to Christ or not? Would not such a perpetual suspicion, in great measure, destroy his peace of conscience, torment his mind, and retard him in the way of performing acceptable and chearful obedience?

If a person is conscious to himself that he does or desires to perform all his duties purely from the motives arising from the faith, may he not claim God, as his own God, upon that footing?

Must he, upon every instance of backsliding, cast away that confidence of hope, and be reduced to the same uncertainty as at first?

When he is recovering from his backslidings, being convinced of his sinfulness therein from the faith of the Gospel, may he not now recollect his former experiences and duties as evidences of his interest, to promote his repentance and encourage his return to God as his own God?

On the other hand, if a person professes the pure truth, and nothing appears to the contrary, unless it be this; that his soul is uneasy, his conscience disturbed and terrified, and he is under continual anxiety about his own interest; fear-

ing he has never believed, or that he has never experienced a converting work upon his soul, by the faith of the Gospel: not finding his heart warmed, his love inflamed, nor strength and courage in practical duty conveyed into his soul, by those blessed truths which he believes and loves: wherein does this prove the weakness of his faith? or what part of the truth is either hidden from him, or denied by him? For it is not enough for him to be told, that he (possibly) is no believer, unless it be pointed out to him wherein his mistake about the truth lies, or what article of it he does not believe.

If a person thus affected takes pains with his heart, and watches over his steps in order to get comfort and peace, is there not an apparent danger lest he should act in a self-righteous way?

If the evidence of our own interest depends upon our own endeavours and improvements, agreeable to and founded upon the truth of the Gospel; does not this open a door for laying some stress upon our own attainments, which may tend to something like self-righteousness or the swelling our spiritual pride; since upon this plan a person obtains the comfort of his own interest by his endeavours, though not the interest itself. How shall these dangers be avoided, in this and the former question?

In what sense, and in what respects, or upon what occasions is a believer to look upon himself as actually exposed to the curse of the law, and liable to everlasting vengeance?

I have laid before you this variety of questions, with no captious or insnaring design; but my reasons are these: Because every particular does not at present lie clear in my own mind: because different persons are disagreed about your meaning in these points: because some friends put such questions to me, and I should be glad to be better

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LETTER VII.

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ter furnished with proper answers to them; and because I think we cannot be too exact and nice to keep at a distance from every species and degree, both of Neonomianism and Antinomianism.

I do not expect or desire a laboured and distinct answer to each question, but have proposed them all, that you may see whereabouts the stress of the difficulties lies. Please to favour me with as speedy a reply as you conveniently can, and you will exceedingly oblige

Your humble Servant, &c.

Sept. 16, 1758.

S. P.

L E T T E R VIII.

R. S. to S. P.

S I R,

HAVING considered your questions, I should be glad if I could throw my thoughts into any new mould or form to render them more plain and easy to be understood. In the Churches with us we have indeed had uncommon opportunities of enlarging our experience, though not experience to be vaunted of. For if our religious history were to be fairly extended, it would much resemble that of *Israel*: it would be a history of much divine mercy and long-suffering on the one hand, and of much human perverseness, folly, and blindness on the other. We have been conducted to what we have attained of the Christian profession, as by the hand of Him who leads the blind in paths that they have not known. Many interesting facts, in the course of providence, have concurred to throw light on various passages of Scripture, respecting our faith and order. And the more clearly the light has shined among us, the corruption of human nature, as opposing the Gospel, has shewed itself among us in the more striking views. So that perhaps no people have had more opportunities of observing how deceitfully that corruption opposes and undermines the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God than we. And yet, after all the pains that providence has taken with us, the truth in its simplicity is the first thing we are ready to let slip and lose sight of.—The case of a Christian keeping the faith against

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against his natural bias, and that of a Church doing the same as a society, looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, &c. very much resemble and illustrate each other. And analogous to both these is the outward contention with the world about the faith. All these go hand in hand together; the New Testament will not read otherwise.—I cannot propose to be particular here. What passes more obscurely in the minds of individuals receives a more distinct and explicit form in the commerce of a society joined together as one body. And the more public application of the Christian doctrine to cases in the society, affords the most forcible instruction for directing the more private exercise of individuals.—We have had access to see the more notable passages describing the appearance of Christ's kingdom, verified in a remarkable manner. Such as, “There are many that are first
“that shall be last, &c. For judgment I am
“come into this world, that they which see
“not might see, and that they which see
“might be made blind. This Child is set for
“the fall, and rising again of many in *Israel*.
“And all the trees of the field shall know, that
“I the Lord have brought down the high tree,
“have exalted the low tree, have dried up the
“green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done
“it. And all the Churches shall know that I
“am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.”
—Many who have held the first rank among us for Christian knowledge, experience, character, &c. have on the trial turned out hypocrites and unbelievers. Of this number we have had Presbyters, or Ministers of the word. These again have had their place supplied by others, who had nothing advantageous in their history, nothing to talk of for their comfort, but Christ crucified.—
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Our enemies reproach us greatly for our charity as confined to one another; yet they reproach us with no less vehemence for our tyrannical severity toward each other. One would think that these reproaches were contradictory; yet so it is, our order affords a pretty equal handle or occasion for both.—The more private fight of faith, the more publick or social labour of love, and the outward contention with the world, ever drawing their hatred and contempt, would render the profession of Christianity an intolerable yoke, were it not that it is found and known, that there are such things as *Paul* speaks of, Consolation in Christ, the comfort of love, the fellowship of the Spirit, bowels and mercies. We have seen persons, whose conduct has frequently exposed them to reproof, growing in love from a sense of much forgiveness; while we have seen others, of a more careful and exact deportment, losing all savour of the truth, and turning out hardened Pharisees. Yea, we have seen the hypocrisy of such as pretended to the assurance of hope, clearly evinced. While, on the other hand, we have seen others, to our clearest conviction, growing in that assurance without any shew, noise, or pretensions at all; even while they have been growing less in their own eyes, their hearts more touched with the conviction of sin, and their need of forgiveness, and accordingly more enlarged with a grateful sense of the mercy that shines in the atonement, the same mercy that relieved the publican. All true growth in Christianity, is growing in love to the atonement: And this will always be in proportion to our daily sense of the need of it.—Men when first enlightened see but little of the corruption of human nature, as it opposes the gospel, in comparison of what appears afterward on the trial, when they are led to look into the perfect law. — The very outward form of sub-

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jection to the new commandment, is a practical discarding of all differences and distinctions, on account of which we naturally glory over one another. It is a practical declaration, that the same righteousness is unto and upon all that believe without difference. — I have laid together these disjointed hints of doctrine and facts, that, having some notion of the plan or scheme of things I have in view when I write, you may judge with more ease of the sentiments I would establish. — Christianity is so unlike any abstract science, that it may well be said, we know no more about it than is inculcated upon us by repeated interesting facts. And in general it may be said, that whatever notion one has of the Christian experience, it will be found to partake much of the persons and circumstances wherein he is most nearly interested. Yet still it must be allowed, that room ought to be left for an appeal to the Scripture, to rectify our experience, or our mistaken views of facts. And we have this advantage in consulting the Scripture, that we find there a full account, not only of the Christian doctrine, but also of the facts which attended its first reception, with proper remarks on those facts. — The general strain of your questions puts me much in mind of the situation of some of our Churches, during the weight and influence of some persons noted for Christian knowledge and experience, who had left the national Church and joined us.

These persons, tho' not much addicted to the more self-denied and less conspicuous services, excelled in knowledge—they had got pretty much above disquiet on the score of guilt—talked high things of their enjoyments, and the impressions that grace had made upon their hearts. The younger and less experienced were moved with perplexity and envy, striving hard to attain what they admired.

mired in others, or repining at their deficiency,—
 Mean while, in the midst of this vain glorying
 on the one hand, and envying on the other,
 about impressions of grace, the true notion of
 God's grace was insensibly wearing out of sight,
 —till, in process of time, it pleased providence,
 by means of the Scripture, to make the bitter root
 more manifest, —to lay open the hypocrisy of
 some, and disentangle the rest from their snare.
 —I have since seen persons eminent in another
 way, whose appearance and language, while
 reaching conviction and commanding respect, did
 not serve to discourage or awaken envy in the
 weakest, but on the contrary to embolden them
 and bring them up to the same level with them-
 selves; — in a word, to animate all the brother-
 hood with the same confidence and joy in the
 truth. This kind of eminence I would describe
 in the words of *Paul*, as shewing itself by **SPEAK-
 ING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.** This he points
 out as the great scope of all the gifts and means
 of instruction that God hath bestowed, and as the
 great antidote against all deceitful doctrine. So
 he closes his reasoning on that head thus: *That
 we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro,
 and carried about with every wind of doctrine.—But
 speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all
 things, which is the head, even Christ.* When this
 holds the most eminent place in a Church, it cuts
 off all occasions of vain glory, envy, or repining,
 and leads the brotherhood to be like minded, one
 towards another, according to Christ Jesus.—
 If it be true, that even the Angels cannot learn
 the manifold wisdom of God but by the Church,
 how can any of us pretend to learn it by any
 more abstract method of instruction? — The com-
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brethren walking together in unity, to disciples joined together in one body as members, one of another, so as by one spirit to mourn and rejoice together. And as the prosperity of one member often diffuses joy over the whole body, so again the soul that enlivens the body, quickens and revives the most drooping members. And if we think of the case of believers dispersed and deprived of visible communion, it must still be said, that they enjoy their comforts, not as disjointed individuals, but as members of that one body whereof Christ is the head: the spirit that animates the whole body, leading them to join in saying, *Our Father* &c. and to long for the gathering together of all Saints at Christ's second appearing.—Our practical treatises commonly give directions to believers, considered as so many disconnected individuals: and any unity of spirit, commonly cherished among professors, is such as breathes after some worldly prosperity to the gospel, or rejoices in any fancied preludes to such prosperity.—Jesus Christ promises great consolation to his Disciples united together, walking in love, and patiently bearing the hatred of the world.—Many professors and their teachers, not fond of such union and its obvious consequences, yet hearing much said in the New Testament of the attainments and comforts of the first Christians, have laboured much to devise means of enjoying those comforts separately, in some consistency with their interest, their decent figure, and religious reputation in the world.—Instead of the objects that chiefly drew the attention of the first believers, they have endeavoured to fix the chief attention of Christians on a multitude of rules respecting the particular conduct of each in his devout exercises, his attendance on ordinances, and the frame of his heart therein.—Again on finding that few devout people came up to those rules,

rules, many exceptions have been made from them for the sake of weak believers; so that it is difficult to say which of them are absolutely necessary or binding on the conscience, which not. — Yet the comfort and peace of the more serious is chiefly hinged upon them. — As a proof, how little our practical writers have attended to the New Testament, it may be observed, that when they mention brotherly love, they commonly make it one of the last or lowest evidences of a Christian; so that many who could find nothing else to encourage them, have been refreshed by reflecting that they were not destitute of some general vague sort of liking to all good people. — One may sometimes explain more of his mind by a brief notice of a celebrated writer, than if he wrote a dozen of pages. — Dr. *Owen* appears worthy of esteem for something greater than his being a first rate critic, and an indefatigable student; he appears to have known what flesh and blood could not reveal. The stress he lays on the person and sacrifice of Christ, as the center and glory of the Christian religion, must recommend him to all who have any taste for the Gospel. But what shall we say of the force of foreign connections? “Did not *Solomon*, King of *Israel*, “sin by these things? Yet among many nations “was there no King like him, who was beloved “of his God, and God made him King over all “*Israel*: nevertheless, even him did outlandish “women cause to sin.” — The Doctor shews great knowledge of the Scriptures, of the heavenly glory of Christ’s Kingdom, &c. he somehow maintains the scripture notion of faith in its simplicity, while he affirms the persuasion that there is forgiveness with God to be saving faith. Yet in his very manner of maintaining it, his right arm plainly appears to be weakened by a kind of deference to the professors of his time, who looked

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on that notion of faith as a very low one. For while he maintains it, he says, *Let none despise the day of small things*. And he insists but sparingly on that part of his subject. That deference, with other mistakes partly hinted above, has introduced much self-righteous chaff into his practical writings; so that even the *Scotch Seceders*, the most genuine offspring of the old Pharisees, have found a pretence for adopting them.—Notwithstanding his uncommon insight into the nature of Christ's Kingdom, and though he shews great zeal against the *Scotch Covenanters*, yet he himself, especially in his Sermons on more public occasions, appears to be tainted with certain fond notions about an earthly or national *Zion*.—In the general, our most serious practical writers, in proportion as their attention has been drawn off from the *holiness of the truth*, have strained hard to refine on *popular piety*. And as this commonly does not proceed on well fixed or well understood principles, the more thoughtful and serious professors are generally at the greatest loss to judge of their religious or spiritual state.

Now to take a more close view of our subject, though I am not much solicitous about order, yet, for my own ease, I shall class my thoughts under the following heads:

1. In judging aright of the Christian exercise, it ought well to be remembered, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is a plain common topic. But the greatest perplexities in religious exercise, proceed on the forgetting and misunderstanding the plainest things. What is plain, simple and often talked of, is, on that very account supposed to be well enough understood, so that frequently, when the pinch comes, no clearing of difficulties is expected from that quarter.—The wrath of God, revealed from heaven in Christ's death, affords the most awful

view of divine justice; and by our apprehensions of divine justice, we have our chief impression of the *living God*. The fear of divine justice, by its forcible operation on the Heart, imprints our first and strongest apprehension of the *living agency* of God. This fear is natural to sinful man, but the Gospel enforces it and cuts off all evasions.—Now all the comforts of the Gospel, first and last, hold pace with, and are proportioned to this fear. To use a familiar similitude, even a child delights in the smiles of its father, in proportion as it dreads his frown. When the Churches in *Judea* had rest, they walked in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost.—As our natural fear is enforced by the death of Christ, so, in his resurrection, we see the living agency of God no less manifest, in healing and making alive, than it appeared before in wounding and killing. When we do not remember that Christ died under the divine frown, we see no extraordinary miracle in his resurrection. At most we think of it only as on a footing with the resurrection of *Lazarus*, or the forming of *Adam* from the dust, and breathing into him the breath of life. But when we think of him, as dying under the curse of the divine law, yet rising again even from that death to reign in life at God's right hand eternally, we behold a display of power or living agency far beyond that which created the world. The Apostle *Paul* speaks of this matter as too grand for words to express, when he calls it the excessive greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the *energy* of the *strength* of his power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, &c. And all this power is no other than the power of the divine smile, or the complacence of that love which burned with

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such jealousy against sin in Christ's death. This power is conveyed to men by the divine testimony, and is effectual so far as that testimony is believed or understood. This is the power that quickens them who are dead in sins, first commanding belief; then working effectually in them believing, encouraging them in all their patience and obedience, and at last bringing them to reign in life.

2. Many at their first convictions, and afterwards in the course of their profession, are held in great perplexities, not as would seem at first view from their excess of fear, but in reality by their entertaining partial and contracted views of their guilt and danger. There is a great difference betwixt the anxiety of the Pharisee labouring under the complaint, What lack I yet? and the conviction of one who is at his wit's end about himself; and who, like the Publican in the parable, sees nothing about himself but what constitutes him a sinner, and exposes him to the wrath to come. To the latter, the Gospel proves glad tidings! but the former being but half sick, needs not such a physician as the Gospel exhibits. He may indeed undergo much disquiet, repining greatly at his deficiencies, and be very earnest in praying for power and assistance to supply them; but still this thought lurks in his mind, that he has or should have some principle at bottom, which, if properly assisted, might yield him relief. So his mind is quite estranged from the Gospel, which speaks of all that is needful to relieve him as already done, and we may be very sure that every one who finds no relief, no joy in the simple report of the Gospel, is at bottom labouring under some such thought. And the best service that can be done him, is, laying aside all soothing and false tenderness, to deal roundly and plainly with him as an enemy to God and the

Gospel; for till he be brought to view himself in this light, even as ungodly and without strength, he can never see the excellency of that grace which reconciles enemies. He may indeed be apparently very low, but he is not yet weak enough to be helped by the grace of the Gospel.

3. It must always be kept in mind, that Christianity is a supernatural scheme, and all its influence among men wholly of the sovereign good pleasure of God.—When Teachers, listening to the dictates of carnal wisdom, begin to devise the properest methods of promoting a profession of religion, they must soon fall into great mistakes. And the bad influence of those mistakes will fall more immediately and heaviest on the more serious Hearers. — One principal mistake is a false tenderness for those under concern. The Teacher's fondness to encourage every appearance of religious concern leads him to foster that very principle which ought most watchfully to be checked in all religious people, and which proves the chief source of darkness and anxiety to the more serious and thoughtful.—But a Christian Teacher has his limits prescribed him. It is not his business to devise what may be the properest means for promoting the interest of Christianity. His charge is to hold fast the faithful word, to keep the commandment without spot, unrebukeable, be the consequence what it will, let it prove the favour of life or the favour of death to whom it may. In doing this he may offend and lose his most valuable friend, and at the same time save his greatest enemy; he may offend some of the most wise, devout and experienced, and he may gain some of the foolish, the despicable and froward. The direction of the influence of the Gospel is none of his business. In all this it becomes him to submit to the divine sovereignty, and mind the post assigned him.—He must not distrust

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distrust the efficacy of the faithful word, because of the little success it has in the world, or because it may seem too simple, weak and insipid to answer the end proposed. He must always bear in mind that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.

4. A person, by being brought to the knowledge of the truth, is not thereby led to think himself possessed of some good principle, by which he stands more nearly related to God than he was, or than other men. His comfort does not lie in thinking on any thing about himself or any change he has undergone, but he is comforted in thinking on what is without him, on what is absent from him, even on what is in heaven. And in this very thing consists any good change he has undergone. However much his outward conduct may appear to others changed to the better, yet as he is now taught to fear God, to look into his perfect law, and to see his own inside in another manner than formerly, he perceives himself to be more eminently an object for mercy and forgiveness. And thus, though he is far from finding reason to count himself a *better man*, yet so often as the discovery of mercy comforts him, he is very sensible that he is a *happier man*. And the more manifest this appears in his profession, I mean, that he rejoices in Christ Jesus having no confidence in himself, the more eminently does he appear as an object of brotherly love and esteem, and the more eminently useful does he prove as an helper to the faith and joy of his brethren.—Brotherly love and joy in the truth go hand in hand together. When brotherly love is kindled, and enlarged by the appearance of joy in the truth, we are not led to think of any human excellency that can lay a foundation for vain glorying on the one hand or envy on the other, but we are affected

in like manner as *Paul* says the churches in *Judea* were, on hearing that he, from a persecutor, had become a bold friend of the truth; says he, They glorified God in me.

5. We are not nearest to God when we are disposed to entertain the most favourable view of our own religious character, but the contrary. God preserves his people from apostasy by putting his fear in their hearts, quashing from time to time every advance of their self-confidence. It takes a great deal both of awful instruction and mortifying events to make professors thoroughly understand, that not for their righteousness, nor the uprightness of their hearts, do they go in to possess the inheritance. Many a professor, long kept in bondage by partial views of his defects, has been happily relieved by some event driving the nail to the head, and enforcing a clear conviction that he was stark naught. Here I might venture an appeal to the consciences of all who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, if when they have lost sight of every promising sign about themselves, have seen various guilt aggravated with much ingratitude staring them in the face, have found nothing but the attonement to stand betwixt them and the wrath to come, and by that alone have been encouraged to pour forth their hearts before God; if it was not then, I say, that they experienced the most refreshing and most emboldening sense of God's favour? So true is it that the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

He takes most pleasure in men, when they can take least and see least reason for it in themselves. The blessings pronounced by Christ in *Matt. ch. v.* evidently proceed upon this view of things.—Hence we may see when men may properly be said to be edified by what they hear. They are edified, if what they hear serves to dash the restless
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and ever-advancing principle of self-confidence, if it brings them to lower thoughts of themselves and more enlarged views of the divine grace, so leads them to join with the Gentiles, who from the beginning glorified God for his mercy.—Hence we may see how unfit the common addresses at the end of sermons to believers, as distinguished from the careless and unconcerned, are to promote the business of true edification. These addresses serve rather to send away those, who have any claim to the former designation, self-satisfied with a conceit of their distinction, their orthodoxy, &c.

6. Those illuminations and tastings of the good word of God, by which men are enabled to make the Christian profession, so to become objects of brotherly love, and which are the source of spiritual gifts for the edifying of the Church, cannot separately by themselves justly be considered by those who have had them, as proofs of their being Christians. They cannot, I say, justly consider these as the proper fruits and proofs of faith? but rather as the waterings of the Spirit serving to bring forth fruit. These may take place with a very advantageous and promising appearance, and yet not accompany salvation. In distinction from these *Paul* says to the Hebrews;—"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation:—your work and labour of love, &c." But as to the forementioned illuminations or waterings, he says in the same context; The earth which drinketh in the rain which cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." The sixth chapter of *Paul's* epistle to the Hebrews, whence I have been quoting these passages

passages, ought to be carefully considered by all who would form just notions of the christian exercise.—So much does the more refined self-righteous labour assume the form and language of the good fight of faith, that no fixed invariable judgment can be formed of any man's state but by his patient continuance in well-doing unto the end.—No mortal can attain to any such assurance of hope but that he still finds himself occasionally in hazard of losing it, still finds reason with *Paul* to take heed lest, while he benefits others, he himself should prove a cast a-way. Therefore the Apostle in the forementioned chapter says, “And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” And Christ, in *Matth. xxiv.* forewarning his disciples of the power and prevalence of deceit, and of the love of many waxing cold, gives the word of encouragement in this form.—“But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” So in his addresses to the seven churches of *Asia*, the promise is always directed to him that overcometh; and to one of them in particular, “To him that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end.” And it is remarkable that he judges of the spiritual state of them all by their works, as he begins his address to each of the Churches, saying, *I know thy works.*

7. Neither the joy attending the first belief of the truth, nor the additional consolation attending the work of love, is obtained in the way of advancing any claim upon God. When a man first knows the truth, when he is first taught thereby to draw near to God, he is led, even in the full assurance of faith, to be at mere mercy for his salvation. I need not stay to illustrate this. With respect to the other case, we must consider a man as some way engaged in the profession of love

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love to that truth, which serves in various respects to abase his own pride and expose him to the hatred of the world; we must consider him, I say, as thus introduced into a new scene of discouragements. To give relief in the midst of these the additional consolation is bestowed. And when he enjoys it, he is surprised at the mercy that appears in it, and is ready to cry out, Whence is this to me! Even as those who are brought to fulness of joy at last in the divine presence will be ready to cry, Lord, when saw we thee and ministred unto thee!—By this abundant sense of mercy and kindness, he is emboldened to hope and “look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal Life.” *Paul*, speaking of the additional consolation, is filled with thankful surprize at the glory of divine mercy appearing in it. “Blessed be God, says he, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation;—for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.”

8. We must not consider the person advancing to the assurance of hope as engaged in a certain round of duties, so as his comfort should arise from a consciousness of his performing or desiring to perform them from right motives, let them be called motives arising from the faith or by any other name. Thus the Christian profession would become a pharisaical scheme. We must rather consider him, as, at the risk of all other evils, seeking shelter from the greatest in the society of Christ and his Disciples. Now a man may labour under many discouragements, and find himself in various respects obnoxious to the curse of the divine law, and yet his heart not condemn him as destitute of love to the revelation of divine mercy and those who hope in that mercy. And such

are they whom God comforts by his holy Spirit, sealing them to the day of redemption. While they appear in the eyes of the world, and in their own eyes, as outcasts and fit to be rejected, God claims them as his people, he chuses them and causes them to approach unto him. According to what was before cited from *Psalms* cxlvii. he shews them that he takes pleasure in them. Thus their joy is made full, not by any chain of reasoning evincing a change of their state, not by reflecting how right and genuine their former exercises have been, but by such an abundant sense of the divine love shewed in the atonement as leaves no room for, so casts out the tormenting fear of coming short of eternal enjoyment. And this sense of love is such as emboldens the heart, even when entertaining the most awful apprehensions of the divine justice, and the inviolable connection between the curse of the divine law and every the least transgression of it: For it gives boldness even in thinking of the day of judgment, where that justice meets the thoughts in its most awful view.—But not to enlarge on the various considerations that arise here, and the many passages of Scripture that serve to illustrate this subject, I shall take some notice of an objection that may occur to some.

9. If it be suspected that this doctrine has a self-righteous tendency because of what is said above, that those who are favoured with this enjoyment are persons whose hearts condemn them not as destitute of Love; if this be objected, I say, it may immediately be retorted, What do they love? For I all along consider persons as in the exercise of love when favoured with enjoyment. May not a person, while seeing nothing about himself but what exposes him to the wrath to come; at the sametime love the doctrine of forgiveness? Again, how are his thoughts employed when he is in the exercise

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exercise of love? Are not his thoughts then employed with delight in reflecting on the revealed righteousness, the infinite value of the atonement, the mercy that provided it, &c. or complacency in those who hope in that mercy. His thoughts are not then employed in solacing himself by reflecting how genuine, pure, and upright his love is; yet while he is in the exercise of love to the truth, his heart cannot condemn him as destitute of that love.—On the other hand it is proper to remember, that the many awful cautions given by *John* in his first epistle are highly necessary for repelling the pretensions of professors to high attainments, while their consciences must condemn them as making a profession of the truth without the love of it; they are necessary to prevent others from being deceived by such pretenders; and they are fit to beget in such a conviction of hypocrisy, to lead them to the atonement for remission, and so to kindle in them the love of the truth.

10. The difference betwixt faith and experience, or enjoyment, ought to be well attended to. Any sinner, backslider, or apostate, coming to the knowledge of the truth, finds immediately relief to his guilty conscience in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. The truth ever remains as an open sanctuary to the distressed, as an anchor of hope for the wretched.—But many receive the word with joy and endure for a while, who yet in the time of temptation fall away. Their love abates and waxes cold upon the trial of faith. Now the holy Spirit as the comforter is promised and is given to those who continue in Christ's word, even to those, whose love upon the trial, instead of abating, increases. And when the divine love is shed abroad in a man's heart by the holy Spirit, he is not *reasoned* out of his disquieting fear of coming short, but his fear is

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expelled by enjoyment. Consider what *John* in his first epistle says concerning *love perfected with us*, and I presume you will find he can mean nothing else but enjoyment. Even the same thing that the prophet has in view, when, summing up the happiness of the redeemed Church, he says, (*Hosea li, 20.*) *And thou shalt know the Lord.* The same that *Paul* still longed for, after he had entertained large apprehensions of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; — “That I may know him and the
 “ power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of
 “ his sufferings, being made conformable unto
 “ his death; if by any means I may attain unto
 “ the resurrection of the dead.” Every degree of that enjoyment heightens the longing for the full enjoyment at the resurrection. So oft as the meanest believer speaks the truth in love, prays in the Holy Ghost, or gives a cup of cold water from affection to Christ, so many advances does he make toward the full assurance of hope; for love grows by exercise. And there is no Christian, however highly advanced in rich experience, but still needs the exhortation to follow after charity, even as the prospect of greater blessedness to be longed for and enjoyed still opens wider to his view.—Before we leave this head, it is proper to reflect, that as love is perfected by enjoyment so likewise faith is perfected by sight, or the presence of what was before known merely by report; remembering always this, that on this side the grave there is no perfection of either by any proper presence of the things believed and loved: while yet they receive such a perfection in the way of earnest or foretaste by the holy Spirit taking the things of Christ, and shewing them to his people, as cannot well be described but by language borrowed from the glorified state. Accordingly we find the Scripture frequently borrows the lan-
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guage which most properly belongs to that state, in order to describe such a perfection of faith and love, as takes place even in those who, strictly and properly speaking, are yet absent from the Lord.—When *Abraham's* faith was perfected by works, he saw in a figure what he had before heard of in the promise.—It is true, his sight was as of an object at a distance and not properly present. And this is one way the Scripture uses to mark the difference between the perfection of faith in the present and that in the future state. Yet his sight was such as greatly increased his joy. He saw the day of Christ afar off and was glad, or, as one of the Greek expressions imports, greatly rejoiced, that blessing was confirmed to him, and he was called the Friend of God.—Now to apply what has been said to our subject, it will be observed, that, when the additional consolation above spoke of takes place, faith receives a great confirmation by a new kind of evidence, even a sort of presence of the things believed. The person who was before persuaded by the evidence arising from the bare report that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ or God's Anointed, is more abundantly assured that he is the Anointed, when he comes to partake with him in that same oil of joy and gladness wherewith he was anointed. The Apostle *John*, who writes his first epistle to direct believers how to be assured of their interest in Christ, or to know that they have eternal life, plainly points at the confirmation of faith by this new kind of evidence, when he says, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” For they who receive the Spirit of adoption and partake with Christ in the freedom of sons, have in themselves an experimental proof that Jesus is the Son of

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God. — Nor can it be imagined that the holy Spirit, in giving this rich experience and freedom, acts in the least aside from or beyond the line of the Scripture; for he gives it, while he acts as the soul, energy and efficacy of those promises and consolatory sayings, which Christ left with his disciples on the earth, for this very purpose, that during his bodily distance from them, they might have his joy fulfilled in them, and their joy might be full. At this place it may be added, that the spirit of God in his whole work on the hearts of men, never speaks of himself, nor leads men to talk high things of his work upon them, but he glorifies Christ, and leads all in whom he dwells to glory only in the work finished by Christ.

II. When a man walks in love, he has fellowship with God, and enjoys the light of his countenance. But when, by turning aside from the holy commandment, he grieves the holy Spirit, then he loses that enjoyment. All his former experiences, however great and rich, cannot yield him the least comfort here; they rather serve to heighten his pain, and to give him ground to fear, that he is like the ground that has been often rained on, yet brought forth only briers and thorns. Yea, nothing can relieve him but that bare truth to which professors are so loath to be reduced as their only resource for comfort; and I will add, even that bare truth which is the sole spring of joy and delight to those who are favoured with the highest enjoyments of the true kind. And when his conscience is thus relieved from the crying sense of guilt, his love may, perhaps, continue to work for some time amidst fear and painful desire, till it be again perfected or crowned with enjoyment. — Yet it no way contradicts the doctrine now advanced to maintain, that it is very consistent with a person's walking in the light, and enjoying fellowship with God

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God, to find daily need for the blood of Jesus Christ his Son to cleanse from all sin. Yea, so true is this, that the Apostle in the very next verse says "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

12. Perhaps the question will still be urged, If professors ought always to entertain a fear whether they belong to Christ or not? My answer is, It would be happy for them, if they could heartily entertain it, till it be expelled by that joy which no one can take from them. But the great difficulty is how to awaken and keep alive this fear, and make professors duly sensible of this, that if any man have not the spirit and temper of Christ, he is none of his. We are but too ready on every kindly tasting of the good word of God, to mistake the watering for the fruit, and secretly to conclude that our state is at bottom safe and good. —I have hitherto abstracted pretty much from the consideration of joys manifestly hypocritical, that are bred and cherished by corrupt doctrine. To these indeed the fear I am speaking of, is very hostile and destructive; but it is very friendly to the apostolic joy and peace in believing, and serves to dispel the clouds and mistakes that intercept that joy. If Teachers would consult to the best advantage the perseverance and improvement of professors, they must imitate and concur with the divine conduct. God preserves his people by putting his fear in their hearts. A Teacher then, who would work together with God in this matter, must study to keep alive a sense of his fear on the mind of himself and his brethren. And as God no where appears more awful than in the revelation of his grace, *Paul* says. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom, which cannot be moved, let us hold the grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." And

this reverence is attended with fear and jealousy about ourselves, shewing the need of watchfulness and self-examination. Paul writing to those about whom he observed the surest tokens accompanying salvation, after an awful reference to the case of *Israel*, adds, "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." And throughout that epistle he strongly enforces several of the most awful and striking motives of fear. Moreover, that ordinance wherein Christ proposes more especially to correspond with his Disciples, and comfort them, is guarded with a call to self-examination, and a hint concerning his being betrayed by a Disciple.—Let it also be considered, that self examination and jealousy belong to love, and in the exercise of these it is kindled and increased; and every exercise of love is attended with some degree of comfort. For let the enquiry afford ever so much room for conviction, a man cannot properly be said to be grieved for his sin, but when the amiable worthiness of the atonement melts his heart.—Besides, the fear of coming short must in the nature of the thing take place in all cases where an amiable object or great benefit is in prospect, and the hazard of losing it great; and that fear cannot properly be abated but by some degree of possession or enjoyment.—One can scarce do a greater hurt to professors, than by indulging them in the thought that they are at bottom possessed of some inherent good principle. All the admonitions of Christ and his Apostles proceed on a very different sentiment. They evidently intimate the great danger professors were in of being deceived, of losing and letting slip what they had heard and attained. Hence so many awful cautions like these; "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered.—If ye con-
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"tinue in the faith, and be not moved away from
 "the hope of the Gospel, &c." But it would be
 endless to produce quotations here.—A Teacher
 runs no risque of exceeding in urging the motives
 of fear, which always arise strongest from the
 doctrine of divine grace. For God himself hath
 taken the charge of comforting his people. And
 he is ever faithful to his word. He ever takes
 pleasure in them that fear him. The promise of
 Christ never fails; "If a man love me, he will
 "keep my words; and my Father will love
 "him, and we will come unto him and make
 "our abode with him."——It will be found
 that the strain of doctrine which is best adapted to
 repress self-confidence, is fittest to encourage the
 weak and broken-hearted.—I have reason likewise
 to conclude, that those who are readiest to sus-
 pect their own hypocrisy, soonest arrive at some
 experience of love perfected with them; even as
 I have found those who entertain most freely the
 conviction of their covetousness and wordly-
 mindedness, soonest led with chearfulness to
 abound in the works of mercy.—Along with these
 miscellaneous reflections I shall here hint an illu-
 stration of our main point. The additional con-
 solation, I say, holds pace with the work of love,
 in its submission, patience, obedience or suffer-
 ing. And it holds pace with it in this manner.
James describing the man who is influenced by
 the Gospel to obey it, says, This man shall be
 blessed in his deed or in his doing. It will throw
 light upon this if we remember what *Paul* says of
 the Macedonians; "In a great trial of affliction,
 "says he, the abundance of their joy and their
 "deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their
 "liberality." The Apostle viewing this, calls
 it, grace bestowed upon them from God.—Take
 also two other instances.—"Ye took joyfully the
 "spoiling of your goods, knowing in your
 "selves,

“ selves, &c.—They departed from the presence
 “ of the council, rejoicing that they were
 “ counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.”
 —See also the blessings in *Matt. v. chap.*

Not to enlarge on the various considerations that arise on this important and copious subject, I shall here briefly sum up and illustrate what has been said and aimed at in these three particulars:

1. Divine grace in its whole progress among men bears always the appearance of *grace reigning through righteousness*. When it first dawns upon the ungodly, speaking peace to those afar off, and giving light to them that sit in darkness; it appears in the divine gift of a perfect and unspotted righteousness. And in all the subsequent favours it bestows on them that believe, it always measures them out in proportion to their conformity to that righteousness, or in other words, to the effect the knowledge of that righteousness has upon them. This will more fully appear at last, when the whole reward of Christ's righteousness, even the sum total of all that grace hath provided, will be distributed to every believer according to his works. Blessedness and holiness always keep pace till the perfect day, when that saying shall be fully verified, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.” — This connection must always be preserved inviolable. Otherwise, the Christian profession will be indensibly obnoxious to the reproach of encouraging sin, because grace abounds: — a reproach highly malicious as pointed against the true Gospel.

2. Grace in its whole progress must appear divine or sovereign; for when we lose sight of Sovereignty, we lose sight of Deity. It is of God that one man comes to the light, while another remains in darkness. It is of God that the love of one professor warms upon the trial and is accordingly crowned with consolation, while that
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of another waxes cold. "It is given you, says Paul, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." James commenting on the proverb which describes God, as giving grace to the humble, gives the sense of it thus, *He giveth more grace*, even more of that same grace, which first appeared in bringing the favoured person to the knowledge of the truth, and teaching him humble subjection to it. So from the first display of grace to the last, it is always more of that same grace. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have." This view among others may be included in these words. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious;" and also in these, "of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." See also *Rom. viii. 28—31*. For the original grace that gave Christ to die for the elect, will as certainly have its full effect in bringing the whole redeemed Church to perfect holiness and happiness at last; as the word addressed to the first man and woman, which set in motion the course of nature (*be fruitful and multiply*) has been effectual to produce all the generations of men that have since inhabited the earth.—If we enquire at the most highly favoured and best experienced Disciples, we shall find that their sense of things corresponds with this. Have they by patient continuance in obedience to the truth, arrived at a settled consciousness that they love it? What does this consciousness amount to? Why, it amounts to this, They are conscious they love that truth which clearly evinces their own utter naughtiness, and the boundless all-sufficiency of divine grace.

3. Joy in God is always proportionate to the impressions of his fear. The smiles of a Deity that

that hates not sin; are no better then the smiles of an harlot. The like may be said of that charity which some call catholic; which can never yield any degree of the ancient comfort of love.—If we look through the Scriptures we find that God hath made room for the highest manifestations of his kindness, by the deepest impressions of his fear. Not to insist on the unparalleled case of the firstborn among many brethren; see the case of *Isaiah*, ch. vi. of *Daniel*, ch. xi. of *John*, Rev. i. and of the three disciples on the Holy Mount. And how great will the contrast of fear and joy be at last, when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout!—I shall close these reflections with a Hymn, composed by one of our men, whose character was of universal weight in the Churches with us, who held the first rank for speaking the truth in love; and who, though he shewed no pretensions above the meanest member, yet appeared to our conviction remarkably growing in the assurance of hope. He died a few months ago.

1.

WHEN to my sight thou, God, appears;
 I'm fill'd with sudden fear,
 Thy justice with uplifted arm
 O'erwhelms me with despair.

2.

The former signs of grace no more
 Relieve my troubled heart,
 And past experiences of love
 Add torture to my smart.

3.

*What shall I do? My prayers and tears
Are impious in thy sight:
I am remov'd from thee as far
As darkness from the light.*

4.

*Is there no room for mercy left?
Is grace for ever gone?
I'll mind the years of thy right hand,
And wonders thou hast done.*

5.

*How to be one with sons of men,
Immanuel did not scorn,
And how from Mary's virgin womb
The holy child was born.*

6.

*I'll mind the greatness of the love,
Which in his breast did burn,
When all the wrath of God for sin
Upon his soul did turn.*

7.

*Oh! did the Father's dearest Son
Go mourning to the grave?
And did he die for sin, that grace
Might dying sinners save?*

8.

*See from the dead the Prince of life,
In glory bright appears!
No further proof of love I'll seek;
This quiets all my fears.*

9.

*This stream of light within the cloud
 Sure token is of grace:
 Where wrath did frown, see mercy smiles
 From lovely Jesus' face.*

10.

*This sign of love my soul relieves;
 'Tis ease from all my pain:
 I will not blush to see thee, God,
 Because the Lamb was slain.*

Since I wrote the preliminary part of this long letter, I have had the satisfaction of reading two Sermons of yours lately published, bearing for a common title, *Saving Grace, Sovereign Grace*. And it is with pleasure I find myself thereby compelled to add to the common address of civility, that of affection.

Dear Sir, By these two discourses you have stormed my heart and taken it. By reading them I was reminded of the words of *Peter*, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God*; and those of *Job*, *how forcible are right words!*—Considering what freedom I have used in censuring, I may well be allowed to commend a little without the imputation of flattery. Every new glance I take of the two Discourses gives me fresh pleasure. They incline me to forget that ever any dispute subsisted between us. Are we then agreed about the character of God? Then it would seem we cannot discord greatly hereafter, unless through some latent mistake, about that wherein we now profess agreement—Now while I find myself obliged to confess a new affection for you, I find myself at the same time constrained to use a more intimate kind of freedom; not as formerly, that
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Jan. 2

LETTER VIII.

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kind of freedom which is directed by the shy jealousy of a stranger, but that which is influenced by the interested concern of a friend.—

Yet I have no animadversion to make on the two Sermons but what is suggested by the Sermons themselves. How unsuitable is page 10th and the application to that uncommon boldness and purity with which the doctrine is maintained in the general strain of the two discourses. But not to enlarge at present, I shall in the mean time, hoping the incongruity will appear to your own reflection, subscribe myself,

Dear Sir,

Your Affectionate Friend,

Jan. 20, 1759

R. S.

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THE
Epistolary Correspondence
BETWEEN
S. P. AND R. S.
CONTINUED.

Never before printed. Anno Domini 1764.

LETTER IX.

R. S. to S. P.

Occasioned by some hints drop'd in a private Letter from S. P. which are referred to and quoted in this.

S I R,

IT was not on supposing you agreed with me in my views of particular men or books, but on apprehending you to be a hearty friend to *sovereign grace*, that my friendly regard for you commenced. I thought, What could move a man to describe it so clearly, to appear so singular in his

his doctrine about it, and that so publickly, not only from the pulpit but also from the press, as one disposed to risque his whole reputation upon it, if he did not heartily love it. And if he loved it, he behoved to hold it most sacred, so as to consider none as godly, but those who at least professed to love it also. Therefore, in remarking on your discourses, I thought it enough to signify, in the gentlest manner, how unsuitable it was to your leading scope, to suppose, that any one, who loved the true God, could be found joining in the common odium shewn against sovereign grace. For let it be called *absolute predestination* or by any other name, still it must remain impossible, to describe it in words, that can sound harder to the pride of men, than these of *Paul*, "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

I thought it enough, I say, to hint my dislike of your 10th page. For as I considered you, as having but lately attained bolder views of the doctrine of divine sovereignty in the matter of justification, I supposed you might have inadvertently retained somewhat of your former way of thinking and speaking, concerning the opposers of that doctrine, not reflecting how inconsistent it was with those bolder views. But when I found you still inclining to think that *true believers* might be found "among those who are carried away by the popular odious cry against "absolute predestination," I was not a little shocked. You could not have alarmed me on a more sacred point. I wonder how you could be at a loss to know what I dare to say on that point, if you have read page 166 or 347 of my printed Letters, or what I have said on charity from page 452 to 480. Must I be still put to the question, after all I have said, whether I be yet talking for amusement about the christian doctrine, or in good

good earnest? True believers taking a side against sovereign grace! Impossible. It never was, never can be in the nature of the thing. The first dawn of the gospel upon any man's heart, teaches him to fear God and reverence his sovereignty in the most absolute view it can be conceived in. And all that fear God, from the least to the greatest, will agree without hesitation in saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and through thy will they exist and were created."

But then it will be said, that some who dislike the explicit doctrine of absolute sovereignty, may yet, by implication, be concluded friends at bottom to that sovereignty. Yet nothing can be more foreign to the scripture than such reasoning. The scripture indeed leads us to think of men having the form of godliness without the power, but it no where gives us the least ground to think, that the power can possibly take place where the very form is disliked. It leads us to think that men may some way hold the form of sound words without faith and love; but that faith and love can be where that form is disallowed, is quite foreign to every notion taught us by the scripture. —If such reasoning by implication be allowed, then we may find true believers among those who dislike the declaration of imputed righteousness and vicarious punishment, among those who dislike the declaration of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, and so in course every thing that is most sacred. Yea thus we may find true believers among the worshippers of Mahomet. For if Mahomet signifies a prophet, intercessor or mediator, and if some mean as much by the word Mahomet as others by the word Christ, who would contend for a word, while there was no material difference of meaning?

Jesus Christ, praying for his people, said, "This is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." How then can any who disallow the declaration of that knowledge, either that of divine sovereignty, justice, or mercy, be said to have any part in life eternal! If we have any ear to give to the Scripture, we must rank all such among those "who know not God and obey not the Gospel, and who (if they repent not) shall be punished with everlasting destruction." And if we have any true benevolent concern for such, it will lead us boldly to declare to them their real danger, however harsh or ridiculous it may sound in their ears at present: Tho' all the clergy in the world should agree in a charitable opinion of any who disallow the declaration of that knowledge, I find myself fully authorized from the Scripture to declare such charity to be the very breath and spirit of the grand destroyer.

Jesus Christ declares, that by their words men shall be justified, and by their words they shall be condemned. And in his view lightly or readily to speak evil of him, is the same thing as to be against him, or be his enemy. Well then may we say, that every one who deliberately opens his mouth against the divine sovereignty, even in the most absolute view of it given in scripture, thereby shews himself to be an enemy to God. Besides, to talk of divine sovereignty or predestination not absolute, is a downright absurdity; even as every atheistical scheme is. How great was *Paul's* temptation to mince the doctrine of divine sovereignty, when his heart was swelled with sorrow at the apprehension of his kinsmen being rejected! Yet on that occasion he is so far from mincing it, that he displays it in the boldest view, even in that view, which has for many ages gi-

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ven the greatest umbrage to thousands, who by their opposition to it shew, that in calling themselves christians they atheistically profane the christian name, and the name of the true God.—So the question has at last come to this between us, Is there a God or not? For a God without sovereignty is no God at all.

What satisfaction can a man find in his conscience, in maintaining saving grace to be sovereign grace, if at the same time he thinks that a man may be a true believer, so enjoy the divine favour, who opposes that grace? Or what delight can a man take in the character of the true God, who thinks that his neighbour may be truly pious and happy in worshipping another God? In my view, the more a man knows of the character of the true God, and is yet capable of holding it in such a profane manner, he is thereby only so much the more eminently fitted to be an agent of Satan in undermining it.—I fondly presumed that our friendship had commenced upon a sacred foundation, even sovereign grace; but if we must both have the same friendship for those who oppose that grace, or who join in the opposition; then it is evident, there can be nothing more sacred in our friendship than in the mutual courtesy that takes place among Infidels. Have we then been all this while employed only like two philosophers striving who shall get freest of inconsistencies in their manner of talking!

Any attempt to revive the christian profession with you must be the idlest thing in the world, unless it be founded in the fear of God. When Jacob was to swear by his most awful view of the divine Majesty, he chose to swear by the fear of his father Isaac; even that sovereignty at which Isaac trembled with a great trembling, when he beheld his favourite first-born rejected, and his younger son chosen. Were a few with you united

ted only by the fear of God, they would find themselves concerned to regard the noisy cry of all *England* against them, no more than the falling of a cascade or the humming of so many bees.

Paul lays down the following rule as a first principle to be attended to, by all who would profitably study the will of God revealed in the Scripture. "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." No sooner does a man begin to be over-awed by the cry of the religious world, than, like *Peter* seeing the wind boisterous, he begins to sink, and the majesty of the truth is eclipsed from his view. And till your mind undergo some change in this respect, I am afraid that the continuance of our correspondence will only serve to raise fresh doubts in your mind, and that you will never be able to take my meaning rightly, or at least will still doubt, if I can be in earnest in what I say.

You gently move me to withdraw some expressions of resentment against those who corrupt the Gospel, in my second Letter, Sect. 3. in reply to your third query: Where, after discoursing of the glorious evidence of the truth, I proceed in these words, "Can one enter for a few moments, &c." The expressions of resentment there uttered, tho' no particular persons are pointed at, you seem to think not very suitable to the gravity of the rest of my language in that passage, and therefore wish to have the sentence dropt. Now as I am sensible it was never left to me to write any appendix to the Bible, I have no reason to be very anxious whether any sentence in my letters be dropt or retained: yet as I am far from approving the temper of mind which hints a dislike of the sentence now pointed at, I am not disposed to comply with that temper.

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You have in the course of our correspondence sufficiently cleared yourself from the imputation of approving that temper and language in my printed letters, which is most offensive to the religious world. With this you ought to have been contented without soliciting me to entertain a more favourable view of the world; especially, as I was willing to bear with you in that, wherein I thought you deficient, till on a proper trial your own experience should more fully shew you how the world stood affected to the Gospel. Now my bias cannot appear more censureable to you than yours does to me. For unless the Gospel be held forth in its proper opposition to the taste of the world, I must consider all that's said about it, as little other than so much religious canting to acquire a reputation for piety. And the nearer one comes to the true gospel, while at the same time a reserve is made for softening or averting the hatred of the world, such reputation is often established to the better advantage. But I must consider those as keeping but a very slack hold of the gospel, who cannot heartily approve of *Paul* denouncing his repeated anathema against all, be they men or angels, who go about however sily, to undermine the doctrine of divine grace which he preached.

Besides, I must differ from you as to the gravity and propriety of the sentence above pointed at in my second letter. I find it was *Paul's* manner, when his heart was warmest about the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, to point his keenest resentment against those who defaced that knowledge. Yea, this was a topic he frequently insisted on, as appears by many passages of his epistles; of which at present I shall only produce one for a sample. While he is reminding the Philippians of his view of the gospel, the effect it had upon him, and calling upon them to follow him; he

adds

adds, "For many walk of whom I have told you
 "often, and now tell you weeping, that they are
 "the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end
 "is destruction, &c." And how can we be said
 to hold the truth in the fear of God, unless we
 are persuaded that destruction attends every de-
 parture from it both in ourselves and others? Un-
 less we are so persuaded, our zeal about the gospel
 will amount to no more than an idle emulation
 about orthodoxy. And it may be held for a sure
 maxim, that however zealous we may be to hold
 a sounder set of principles than our neighbours,
 we can never greatly condemn ourselves for any
 deviation from the truth, that we think consistent
 with the christian character in others. It ought
 likewise to be considered, that as the unsociable
 temper of my book was chiefly attacked; it was
 my business, so long as I approved that temper, to
 take every proper occasion of shewing that I had
 not relented, and that I was neither to be wheed-
 led nor frowned out of it. And that temper I
 hope I shall approve while I breathe.—If ever the
 profession of the faith begin to purpose with you,
 it will begin with razing foundations, with hearty
 convictions of guilt for holding the truth in un-
 righteousness, and with trembling at the words
 of James; "Ye adulterers and adulteresses,
 "know ye not that the friendship of the world is
 "enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore will
 "be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."
 —I know no character a Christian ought to detest
 more than that of Balaam, who preached the
 soundest doctrine, saying, "Lo! the people shall
 "dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among
 "the nations," and who knowing that the hap-
 piness of Israel lay in being so situate, nevertheless
 practiced secretly to mingle them with the heathen,
 by negotiating an alliance between them and the
 Moabites.—Mr. Baxter, noted for piety in the
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last age, slackened a point of the christian doctrine, and you see what has been the consequence among the dissenters!—I must add here, that as the love of the world and self-righteousness always go hand in hand together, I cannot wonder greatly at your scrupling to admit, that returning backsliders can draw no encouragement from past experiences. Yet the voice of God runs thus, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” When the conscience of an apostate is awakened to hear this voice, he can by no means conclude, from any past experiences, that God has any pleasure in him more than in the most ignorant and profane. He can infer nothing from past experiences but peculiar aggravations of his guilt. And when such are heartily awakened, they commonly find their objections against the doctrine of forgiveness stronger than at the first. Therefore, it is in some respects a greater miracle to see an apostate fairly recovered, than to see one at first brought to the knowledge of the truth.

The four addresses at the close of your two sermons, appear to me to have in general a tendency to adapt the soundest doctrine to the common train of self-righteous exercise. The first makes use of the doctrine to carry forward the careless to the rank of serious exercised persons. The second serves to set the awakened to work in curbing their legal attempts, and be concerned to get themselves placed at the footstool of sovereignty, or to be brought to a proper posture so as to be led to place their hope alone upon the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. The next addresses a third sort of persons as being, in distinction from the former two, in a proper posture to find mercy. The last congratulates the orthodox, presuming them possessors of the best dispositions. I think it needless to enlarge on these heads, as from what you have already
seen

seen of my mind, you may easily judge what I would further say. You may likewise judge that I must either drop all mention of your two sermons, or in some general manner signify my exception against p. 10th, and the application.—They have likewise a little dash of the clergyman, tho' modest, in comparison of what is commonly allowed to be decent, as, "Let *me* proclaim," and, "Behold I bring you glad tidings."

When I received your last letter, as I first read the beginning and end before I took leisure to consider the particulars relating to our correspondence, I was greatly refreshed. It was to me like the cool of a fever, or as life from the dead. But when I found you seeking to damp my confidence about divine sovereignty, and soliciting me to hold it, as if I held it not; I was greatly shocked. I thought, if you believed, it behoved to be like those chief rulers who believed *John* 12. "But because of the Pharisees, they did not confess, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Yet in my view, one has but a poor pretence even to the character of a Pharisee, who opposes the common Calvinist doctrine of predestination.—Besides, how can one avoid being grieved to find that after all he is able to write, even on the most sacred matters, it is still doubted if he be in jest or in earnest?

I am obliged then to say, that if you would correspond any further with me, you must refrain from every attempt to damp my confidence about that knowledge wherein eternal life lies, even the knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. For I must consider every such attempt in no other light, than as a solicitation to go and serve other Gods; which I am bound to resent in the strongest manner against my nearest friend. I must likewise repeat my
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warning to you to be cautious, and count the cost well before you risque any thing on your connection with me. And do not imagine that (unless I be forsaken of God) I can never be broken or softened as to that spirit of opposition to the religious world, which runs through my letters. You may see, that if I should write ever so much I have nothing new to say. And I have the satisfaction to think, I have not disappointed or deceived you. For I can take to witness my printed letters by which you first knew me, that I make a point of nothing with you now, but what I insisted on there in the most explicit and determinate manner. I stand by the theme of our agreement, *Saving Grace, Sovereign Grace.* If you depart from that, and a breach of friendship ensue, the breach does not lye at my door. So much from him, who is still willing to be, on the former terms,

Dear Sir,

Your affectionate Friend and Servant,

March 24, 1759.

R. S.

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LETTER X.

S. P. to R. S.

SIR,

HAVING lately made an excursion into the country, and having been otherways much employed, I have not been able to find an opportunity of making a reply to your last faithful letter of March 24. Neither have I now time to give you fully my thoughts upon the contents thereof. Shall therefore only drop a few hints. I did but gently move you to withdraw some expressions of resentment, and gave you the reason; but am very well satisfied they should remain, for the reasons you give. As to a backslider drawing encouragement from past experiences, I mean no more by it than what is hinted, *Hosea* ii, 7. Besides there are different degrees of backsliding. Every degree of it indeed does cloud our evidences in proportion; and when we are brought back from those departures, it is by being brought back to that very hope, love, truth and obedience from whence we have departed. But I cannot at present see how my scrupling to admit, that returning backsliders can draw no encouragement from past experiences, is an instance or proof of the connection between the love of the world and self-righteousness.

When I say, "Nor do I think you dare affirm
 "yourself that there are no true believers among
 "those who are carried away by the popular odious
 "cry against predestination," I founded my
 thought upon the very last paragraph in your 3d
 printed

printed letter, and meant no more by it than what is there expressed: and I likewise recollect, that in one of your letters to me which are now printed, you allow that the least degree of true faith, is saving in *Paul's* sense. You are very sensible that it has been uncommon even in calvinistic writings to connect the doctrine of predestination with that of free justification; whereby the former doctrine has been misapplied to the confusion of many. But I have the satisfaction to find, that many are taught to relish the doctrine of absolute sovereignty as stated in that connection in my two Sermons, and look upon it in that light as a very necessary and acceptable truth. However, it is certain that the doctrine of justification is in great danger of being apprehended in some legal sense, if the sovereignty of grace be forgotten; and on the other hand, absolute election is with difficulty understood and relished by many, for want of seeing along with it free justification by faith in Christ. But how far such a confusion of thought may be in the minds of true believers I pretend not to determine. But I still stand by it, that saving grace is sovereign grace; and that a true believer sees that nothing but such grace as is properly sovereign and absolutely free can reach his case.

There is just now a considerable alarm taken: your person and writings are publicly decry'd by many; and principally because 'tis apprehended that they have had a very bad influence upon myself and one or two more in the ministry. I need not specify distinctly the particulars of the objections, for you yourself can easily suppose of what nature they are. The chief are such as these. That there is something both of Antinomianism and Arminianism in these principles; that the peace and satisfaction arising to the mind from the free gospel, previous to evidences of interest reflected upon, is *enthusiastical*: That your doctrine

destroys the peace and comfort of believers as renewed and justified persons, since it will not let them trust in the change made upon them, but insists upon a confidence in the pure free truth, &c. &c. In the midst of all these objections and outcries, together with the difficulties arising from them, I can find no support but from the free gospel; having that persuasion, that divine grace revealed therein is sufficient for me. My mind is fill'd with a mixture of hope and dread with respect to consequences, together with a grieving concern for those, who seem to be rather distress'd and perplex'd than comforted and enlivened by the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God, as separate from every thing else for a foundation of peace and hope God-ward. I am now in the station of *Habakkuk*, in a watching, waiting posture, ch. 2. 1. and praying that the glorious light of free-grace may shine brighter and brighter amongst us, and being thankful that there are so many amongst us that seem to have an ear, a taste and relish for the truth.

If you should see occasion to write any thing to me, as in such a situation; a letter from you would be very welcome, as from one, whom I love for the truth's sake.

I rest yours cordially in the blessed Gospel.

S. P.

L E T.

LETTER XI.

S. P. to R. S. again.

September 2, 1760.

Dear Sir,

'TIS above a twelvemonth since I wrote last to you ; to which letter you have favoured me with a reply. It may well seem strange that there should have been such a *long* silence between us.

I shall say nothing about the Reason of this silence on your part, being able only to guess at it, by what I have seen in some letters of yours to Mr. B——.

But the chief reason why I have refrained so long is this : Because I found 'twould answer no purpose for me to attempt at giving you any satisfaction by an epistolary reply : Since reasonings and apologies would be insufficient. Nothing but *Facts* or *Transactions* in my conduct agreeable to the profession of the gospel, and an adherence thereto, I saw would be suited to answer this end. Many of this nature have occurred of very considerable importance, which I need not here relate. For I understand you have seen the pamphlet written by my opponents, entitled, *The Case of the excluded Part, &c.* I herewith send you my reply thereto, intitled, *A dispassionate Narrative, &c.* I cannot pretend to say, what judgment you may

pass upon the whole when you have seen and considered both sides.

In my narrative I have readily own'd some mistake in my conduct; and considering the perplexity of my situation for so long a time, 'tis possible there may, upon strict examination, appear some other particulars which are not properly according to the truth of the gospel. I know that the gospel is of an humbling, searching, and convincing, as well as of a comforting nature; so that the more clearly it shines into the mind, the more it discovers the defects in the thoughts and conduct. May I be more and more convinced and corrected by it. But I have already been so far searched and strengthened by it, as makes me thankful that ever it was opened to me so clearly as by your writings: For which reason I cannot but maintain an affection towards you for the truth's sake, whether I can see evidence to approve and justify *every* particular, which you have received to hold or no. If you think fit to point out to me, with the utmost freedom and faithfulness, wherein you apprehend I am defective; so that it be done, not with that kind of freedom which is directed by the shy jealousy of a stranger, but that which is influenced by the interested concern of a friend (as you have well expressed it) 'twould be esteemed a particular favour, by

Yours affectionately in the gospel of grace,

S. P.

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L E T T E R XII.

R. S. to S. P.

Dear Sir,

YOUR friendly letter brought me by Mr. ———, has served to revive that mixture of tenderness and regret, which has occasionally affected me on your behalf, since I read your *Saving Grace* ; more especially on seeing your *Free Grace*, and lastly your *Narrative*. Yet I must say you lay a hard task upon me, when you urge me to animadvert on your conduct since the interruption of your correspondence, and that with the freedom of a friend. Not that I find myself straitened in respect of a friendly disposition toward you ; but I fear lest what my friendship would dictate, might seem liker the language of one affecting superiority over you ; or in fewer words, liker that of a master than a friend. For, however inclinable I may be to assume the former of these characters, I am sensible I dislike the appearances of it. Besides, another consideration serves to cramp my freedom. When one is censured, he naturally expects that the censure should not only be just, but also appear to be so, as founded on clear Facts. Now in judging of your conduct, I lay under a great disadvantage, by reason of my distance from you and your people. The question between us now is not, What is the saving truth ; but how does it appear that particular persons have received the love of the truth ; or, that it has wrought effectually in them ? Again, in thinking of you I must consider you as a leader, and accordingly keep close in my view, what sort of people are led

by you ; more especially, who have the greatest joint-influence along with you in the leading of the rest. From my general views of mankind, the common effects of impure doctrine, and the scanty informations I have occasionally got ; I have formed some notion of your people as they stood before the separation, but not so as I could evince that notion before one disposed to contradict. But if I am to use the freedom of a friend, I must speak according to my general notions and leading impressions, such as they are ; and if they are wrong, then my reflections must of course fall to the ground.

1. I consider the state of things wherein the rupture was carried on among you, on a footing with the outer court, which *John* was commanded to leave out of his computation, as being altogether unfit to be measured by the rule of God's word. I am at no loss to see that you have been very ill used by the leaders in the opposition. And when I take the place of a by-stander on the spot, or of one used to the methods of procedure in such dissenting congregations as yours ; I am disposed to consider your conduct as amiable, equitable, and condescending in the midst of great provocations, so that as a man, or according to human maxims, I am disposed to respect you, and tenderly sympathize with you in the scene of trouble and disquiet you have gone through. But,

2. When I take my station with *Paul*, or the sons of his doctrine, I find myself touched with regret, at your suffering so much to so little purpose ; for I cannot see how you can gain much as to the real comfort of love by your separation, now that it has taken place. I allow that in the eyes of your neighbouring dissenters, you have acquitted yourself as honourably as the nature of the case would admit. But the great fault I find with your conduct lies here ; that, in that very
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light wherein it seems best fitted to draw their regard, or escape their censure, it appears to me most unsuitable to the spirit of *Paul's* doctrine. The controversy has not been so carried on as to intimate an evident token of perdition to the opposers, and of salvation to the friends of the truth contended for. Now it will always be found, that so far as the divine displeasure against the opposers of the truth is dissembled through modesty, fear, or whatever principle ; so far must the joy of its professed friends be damped, and their comfort of love among themselves weakened. Among you, truth and error have been set upon a pretty equal footing, or as you express it to Mr. *T. U* ; you have left your conduct to be considered much upon the same footing as if you had turned *Arminian*. So that the by-stander is not struck as he ought with the divine majesty of the point in dispute ; but his attention is rather drawn to consider the good or ill conduct of the different sides, in a good measure abstractly from the disputed point. How would you answer to *Paul*, not to say his Lord, for being tender of your own reputation, at the rate of abating that confidence about the truth, which becomes a hearty lover of it ? For my part I could have lightly passed over many mistakes in conduct, if I had seen the truth maintained with that confidence and spirit, which the occasion called for.

3. I need not repeat here what I have said in the printed correspondence and my subsequent letter to you, about the antient manner of contending for the faith. I only make this general reference to remind you of my sentiments on that head. But it is enough if you keep in mind what *Peter* says : “ If any man speak let him speak as “ the oracles of God.” Therefore he who speaks for God ought not to hold the word of faith as a problematical point ; as to which it may be allowed

ed that men may appear in the opposition with sincerity, as in the main candid lovers of truth. For if a man is confident that he speaks for God, he must be confident at the same time, that however the opposition be managed, the devil is at the head of it. Now in remarking on your conduct, I need not go further back than that period where (Narrat. p. 5.) you began to discern the greatest part of my censures justified; that is about *Aug.* or *Sept.* 1758, when two leading members, who had till now encouraged you in cleaving to the truth as you now understand it, began to shew themselves industrious and sanguine in the opposition. Upon this, after taking notice of the *great candour and decency* of one who never approved your change of sentiment, you proceed to say; "I
 " now proceeded taking all pains in preaching
 " this doctrine, with a view to obviate the objec-
 " tions brought against it, still avoiding all reflec-
 " tion and even the air of controversy in public.
 " But notwithstanding all my care and lenity,
 " &c."

4. Here is fairly expressed the principle of all that appears to me blameable in your conduct; and to this source I ascribe what still appears to me matter of regret in your present situation. As before the above mentioned period you was an avowed objector to the proper spirit which (I think) appeared in the ancient contention for the faith; it was the less wonder to find heart enemies to the gospel disposed to promote your clearer views of it; for they saw you zealous in averting the natural consequences, or keeping out of sight the dreadful aspect which the saving truth bears to all who oppose it or receive not the love of it; and accordingly evading the odium which always attends the true profession of it. 'Tis true, one of them early smelt the consequences, and was accordingly so *candid as all along to shew his disapprobation of*
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your change. At length, two of those who had gone along with you, if not before you, began to consider what they were about, and smelt the consequences too; and accordingly soon became as zealous in the opposition, as they were formerly in carrying you forward. Now you began to discern the greatest part of my censures justified. that is, I must suppose, you began to see them suitable to the doctrine and spirit of *Paul*. But what effect had this new lesson which you learned from *Paul*, enforced by your own experience? Did it teach you to become more confident in the faith, in nothing terrified by your adversaries? No. Instead of this, while your adversaries were waxing more confident, advancing and gaining ground, you was studying how far you could retreat with safety, or without plainly giving up the truth you had professed. You continued careful to preach with such lenity as to avoid even the air of controversy. Thus it is manifest you retreated so as to fall obviously short of the growing conviction of your own mind, helped forward by experience. Your adversaries, who saw further into the matter than you did, or than you had courage to express, dissembling their sense of the awful consequences that secretly galled them, proceeded in the warmth of their zeal for holiness and fears of Antinomianism, to retale a parcel of lying stories to blacken you, like their fathers, who still averred, "For a good work we "stone thee not." What a noble field was here opened for a son of *Paul's* doctrine to shew that he was not ashamed of such a father? Every thing served to animate you to the combat; but alas! you disliked even the air of controversy. And for what reason? None that I can see, but that you might make as decent a figure as possible with *Paul's* gospel in your hands, in the eyes of your dissenting brethren, and conciliate favour to yourself

self among those who loved not that gospel. I am persuaded the more you enter into *Paul's* spirit, the more reason will you find to reflect with shame on your neglecting so noble an opportunity of shewing yourself a true son of his doctrine. 'Tis difficult to set this matter in a proper light, without using the sarcastic stile. *Paul*, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. iv. when he does not charge them with overthrowing the truth of the gospel, but observes their disposition to embellish it, to glory in their gifts, and make a more wise, creditable, and less obnoxious appearance with the gospel than he did, addresses them in this manner; "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ, &c." And after he has finished his sarcastic strain, he affectionately declares his serious design in it. "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you; for though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers, &c." Here I may likewise remind you of what the same apostle says to Timothy, when exhorting him to kindle up the gift he had received. "For (says he) God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind." Under the spirit of fear we may well include all that reverence for the opinion of men, which so readily surprizes us into shame, damps our confidence about the gospel, and tempts us to smooth its frowning aspect against their ungodliness and self-righteous pride, and accordingly to shun the cross. For he immediately adds, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner; but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." And what he here says to Timothy about the difference between the spirit of fear, and that of power and love; well coincides with the contrast

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contrast he states to the Corinthians, between the Spirit of the world, and the spirit that is of God.

5. I am far from saying you was not carried forward in your late conflict by a conviction of the truth of the gospel. I see that conviction plainly enough operating all along : But at the same time I see no less plainly the spirit of the world counter-acting the operations of that conviction, and defeating its genuine effect. Yea, worldly maxims appear to have taken such hold of your mind, as to enter into your very conscience, and take the place due only to God's fear. I shall here take notice of a remarkable instance, which I would fain hope should carry conviction along with it. When you was greatly tempted (Narrat. p. 62) to be accessory to what yourself counted a dreadful prophanation of the sacred ordinance of the supper, you resisted the temptation with a great hurry and discomposure in your spirit ; for which, you say, you heartily repent, quoting as the ground of your repentance the words of *James*, " The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." How foreign this use of *James'* words to his sense ! In the place referred to, the apostle is evidently speaking of that wrath of man, which works in the way of repining against God, when we are tempted, or when we are found guilty, that leads us, instead of soberly admitting conviction, to fret at the circumstances wherein God placed us ; in a word, that wrath which is expressly opposed to meekly receiving the ingrafted word which is able to save our souls. Will any attentive reader of the scriptures infer from this ; that, on proper occasions, a man may not shew the tokens of his displeasure as freely and fervently as those of his complacency and delight ? Or, that a man may not be as much under the influence of the spirit of God in the one case as in the other ? Does not divine charity reverence and imitate

imitate the wrath, in equal proportion as it does the complacency of God? Is not the passionate action of *Phineas* recorded as highly agreeable to God; because, saith God, he was zealous for my sake, or to retain the *Hebraism*, he jealous of my jealousy? Does not *Paul*, when about to address the Corinthians with the most severe sarcastic and indignant language, declare that he is moved thereby by the jealousy of God? And is not jealousy said to be the rage of a man? Moreover, is not the divine jealousy represented as burning like fire, and smoking against its objects? If a man, whom you had entertained in your house as a friend, should be rude to your wife in your presence, would not your blood boil with indignation at the insult, if the soul of a man remained within you? Will you then say, it is a sin for a man to be heated with indignation against those, who would tempt him to a dreadful prophanation of what he holds most sacred? Were I to seek for a fault in this case, I would suspect it to lye here; to wit, in so far as the hurry you speak of might intimate a want of confidence to avow your resentment with freedom. And this may naturally enough be suspected, as you would soon be conscious you was sinning against one of the rules of holiness established among Pharisees and Hypocrites. To put things of a sort together; I observe you say in another place, “ I fully intended to have entertained some debate, so long as it could be done “ without warming each others passions.” But pray tell me, if you are possessed of any passions at all, when could they be warmed to better purpose, or on a nobler occasion? Thus you may see how men may have their consciences so vitiated by such rules, as to call good evil and evil good.—But hurried as your resentment was in the forementioned case, I still think it looks as like charity or a proper regard to sacred things, as any part of your conduct

conduct in the matter. Yet I own the likeness would have been still fairer, if it had been quite disconnected from the other points of contention between the parties, of a nature foreign to the concerns of charity. We may next consider how you came to be inveigled with these.

6. I shall now then review your situation by comparing it with what I think would have been the natural effect of your contending for the faith according to the example and spirit of Paul.

I consider your society to have been in general a very self-righteous and earthly-minded set of people, when *Paul's* doctrine came among them by surprize and burst like a bomb in the midst of them. Though you could not but be sensible, in a good measure, of the temper and spirit with which *Paul* maintained his doctrine against all opponents however otherwise respectable, yet you doubted, if it became uninspired men to copy after him in his freedom of speech. But had you entered into *Paul's* temper in contending for the faith according to the spirit of power and love, you might, perhaps, have got a few, most probably of the poorest and least esteemed, who, being moved with the fear of evils not seen as yet, might have chearfully gone along with you in hearing Christ's voice, and observing all things he commanded his apostles to teach his disciples : but I strongly presume you would never have had any chance for gaining a majority in such a society. In this case it would have belonged to you and your few friends, to have withdrawn or separated yourselves from the rest ; and however little a figure you would have made, yet the truth would have shone forth with eminent splendor ; it would have appeared in its proper majesty to the comfort of friends and the terror of foes. But your conduct did not serve to divide your people simply by love or dislike to the truth, but rather

to conciliate favour and esteem to yourself, by hiding the obnoxious aspect of the truth. Thus there is room to fear that many of those who cleaved to you, were rather friends to Mr. *Pike* than to the gospel; rather friends to their gentle benign pastor, who was fond to oblige and loath to offend any one, than to the gospel, which breathed only damnation to all who did not heartily love and obey it. While I say this, I am far from strengthening the plea of your opponents: they have evidently no right to urge this reflection against you; for it is manifest that if you had entered more into *Paul's* spirit, you would have been so much more obnoxious to them, and awakened their indignation to a greater height against you.—The apostles not only preached salvation through Christ, but they boldly declared, in the face of the *Jewish* rulers, “Neither is there salvation in any other.” Call to mind likewise *Paul's* repeated anathema against the Judaizers; then reflect upon your own conduct. In your address, Aug. 6, 1759, having set forth, so far as you go, a just view of the gospel, you proceed to say, “You may see by what I have said, that I cannot but lay a most important stress upon this view of the divine revelation of free and perfect grace in Christ, as the only immediate ground of hope, comfort, and obedience.” Then you immediately add, “But in doing this, I do not set about to judge or condemn those as destitute of divine grace and truth, who appear to be otherwise minded.” And you are fond to take hold of the cavils of your adversaries, as giving you reason to charge them as making the difference to be fundamental, and to clear yourself of such an obnoxious charge. Again, near three months after, reminding your people, how on Aug. 6, you had opened your whole mind and heart to them, you proceed thus: “I did it
“ then

“ then with the greatest freedom and openness I
 “ was capable of ; at the same time expressing my
 “ resolution, under the teachings of the word and
 “ spirit of God, to abide by that view of the gos-
 “ pel I then represented to you, as of the greatest
 “ importance to my own and your true support,
 “ consolation, and satisfaction.” And why not
 of such importance as that neither you, your
 friends, nor any other, could have true support,
 &c. without it? Being afraid the dissatisfied would
 intrude upon your communion, you say “ Our
 “ minds were greatly perplexed, I say : not as if
 “ we looked upon those dissatisfied members as no
 “ real christians : we had nothing to do to judge
 “ their state or their hearts, but only to consider
 “ what was our real duty.” Again, giving rea-
 sons why, if you had been only a private member,
 you would have absented from the table as some of
 your friends did, you say, “ My reasons are
 “ these. Not, as I said before, to intimate as if
 “ I *herely* called in question the state of their souls
 “ before God, who had shewn such a dissatisfac-
 “ tion, but because, &c.” Here you proceed to
 talk of the necessity of union, in a view abstracted
 from the centre of christian union, though it was
 manifest that centre was the very source of the
 dissatisfaction. Again, you proceed thus ; “ Here
 “ you must remember, that the difference between
 “ us professedly relates to a point of the utmost
 “ consequence. Now whether this difference be
 “ *real*, or whether it be only *in words*, as I would
 “ hope it is, yet still it is *apparently* to such a
 “ length, as to make the dissatisfied persons to be
 “ almost totally absent from the preaching to the
 “ church, as unprofitable to them and erroneous
 “ in their esteem. ’Tis a difference—that arises
 “ from the very nature and substance of the doc-
 “ trine preached.” Did not you sweat when you
 first said or wrote this paragraph?—But my letter

is swelling ; I must be brief now.—When your friends come to cleave to you, in separation from the dissatisfied, they say and subscribe, “ We cordially approve of and are edified by the doctrine of Christ, which he [our pastor] has more, especially of late, preached amongst us.” Thus your friends and foes are ranked as such, not upon a direct reference to the gospel as exhibited by Christ and his apostles, but as exhibited through the medium of their pastor’s preaching; and the formal bond of union among your friends is the ministry or their pastor. Now I can easily conceive how many of your people might take side with the gospel, as preached by their pastor, who might yet dislike it much as preached by *Paul*: and it does not appear to me from your narrative, that you have been very jealous for the honour of Christ in distinguishing upon this point; it would rather appear that it required glaring facts, in the way of opposition to yourself, to make you sensible of the opposition of men’s hearts to the grace of Christ, and after all you appear loath to speak out what glaring facts must compel you to think.

7. There is yet one thing that deserves particular notice. You find it necessary to obviate an apprehension of your being till of late an unconverted person. This apprehension, it would seem was either suggested or expected from your opponents, and thought likely to weaken the minds of your friends. What a noble opportunity presented itself here for you to oppose and trample upon the self-righteous pride of conversion, which is of so extensive influence among professors? Or, had you yet to learn that a self-applauding presumption of conversion, was a leading characteristic of a modern pharisee? Or, could you be ignorant, that your people were, in general, tainted with that pharisaical leaven? And would not a hearty lover of the truth be ashamed, so much

much as to lay any claim to conversion among people tainted with that leaven? Would he not chuse rather to take his rank with publicans and harlots, or, like *Paul*, with the chief of sinners, and glory only in the saving truth, as it speaks peace to them that are afar off, and accordingly pour contempt on all the conceited notions of conversion prevalent among professors? Acting thus, he would bear a strong impresson upon my mind, that, whatever he was before, he was converted now. I say again, what a noble opportunity had you of shewing with *Paul*, that what things were gain to you, you counted loss for Christ? But you was loath to risque the credit of your conversion, and therefore you would give your own opinion in its favour. But how do you support its credit? Why, you refer to an old illumination about the freedom of grace, when you was in the near views of death. Is it thus, think you, that the credit of our conversion is to be supported, either in our own minds or to the conviction of others? But I forbear to urge this point any further.

8. I might yet proceed to say many things to the same issue with the foregoing remarks, and which friendship would dictate, but know not when I should have done, if I should stay to illustrate them all. Had I not thought you had got some taste of the difference between the things of God and those of men, I would have thought it trifling to have said half so much as I have done. Perhaps you may think, it was not at once but by degrees that the churches with us attained to their present views of the christian faith and order, therefore we ought to remark on your conduct with greater lenity than we do. But it is proper for you to know, that what progress they have made has been attended with much conviction of worldly-mindedness and hypocrisy in those

who have continued, and with the loss of many friends who had remained in respect with us, if God's word had not interposed. I am not sensible of using you otherwise than according to the usage that has taken place all along among ourselves.—Now, after all, I am far from thinking that you are yet happily connected with your present friends, either as to the christian faith or order. Have your pretenders to learning and wisdom yet seen the beauty of that text, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent?” Or your rich men seen the beauty of that, “Let the rich brother rejoice in that he is made low; because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away?” I would think it needless to be particular with you about the christian order, unless I saw you connected with friends disposed to hear Christ's voice.

So much from him who would have great pleasure in being able, with full freedom and confidence, to subscribe himself your affectionate friend for the truth's sake,

Edinburgh, Sept. 27, 1760.

R. S.

LET-

L E T T E R XIII.

S. P. to R. S.

Dear Sir,

I Think it my duty to thank you for the cordial friendship and faithfulness which run through your letter to me, dated September 27.

I read it likewise before the brethren of our church, who all took it in good part, although we could not but be conscious, that you were mistaken in some of your leading impressions and general notions, by reason of your distance from us. I might here set about to specify the particulars distinctly, wherein you have misunderstood the strain and tendency of our conduct; but you will easily see them by what follows, wherein I shall lay open some things which it seems you are not sufficiently aware of. Curiosity led me above two years ago to borrow your letters on Theron of a friend who had read them; by following whose advice it so fell out, that I read over the first letter last; when, after I had read all the rest, my attention was particularly struck by what I found; p. 11, 12. whereupon I reasoned thus. I am firmly persuaded that Christ has done and finished all that the most disquieted conscience can require in order to peace with God: but, in order to remove the uneasiness of a guilty conscience, is there no occasion for any other question to be asked than this, Whether it be true or no? Does it follow that if a person finds this to be true, he is happy? I have been long persuaded of this and preached.

preached it accordingly, and yet I am far from being easy or happy as to my state God-ward : Surely I must know something more than this to quiet my conscience ; I must know my own particular interest, which must be proved by suitable and sufficient evidence, e'er conscience can be pacified or solid peace enjoyed by the blood and work of Christ. The following words in that paragraph then accosted my mind, wherein you say " If we slight the comfort arising from the " bare persuasion of this, it must be owing at " bottom to our slighting this bare truth, to our " slighting the bare work of Christ, and our considering it as too narrow a foundation whereon " to rest the whole weight of our acceptance " with God : " What, thought I, can any solid comfort arise to the mind from this mere truth ? if so, then I have been slighting it all along ; whereupon I presently found, that I had been considering the mere work of Christ, as standing forth in the gospel, as too narrow a foundation for hope and peace God-ward. This thought was directly proved and confirmed to my mind by many texts of scripture ; as that in particular *Isaiah* xxviii. 16. Behold I lay in Zion a sure foundation, and he that believeth thereon shall not make haste. This at once convinced, shamed, and rejoiced me. I then immediately set forward, preaching with pleasure, the all-sufficiency of Christ's work as it stands open and free in the word to give peace Godward. Being much enlivened and encouraged in my soul, by this blessed testimony, I proceeded in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ ; not doubting in my mind, but these glad tidings would be peculiarly acceptable and delightful to others as to myself ; and having a very favourable opinion of *all* my people, I thought the preaching in this strain would prove exceedingly delightful and useful
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amongst them, and be the happy means, in the hands of the spirit, for removing those complaints, doubts, and scruples, that I knew were in the minds of many, as before in my own. It answered my expectation to a great degree for a considerable time ; which confirmed and established that good opinion I had entertained concerning my people. Not doubting but they all had the root of the matter, I was chiefly solicitous and desirous to be instrumental in dispelling those clouds, which had in a measure interposed between their minds and the glorious light of the gospel ; and by a continual presentation of the proper freedom of grace, I was in hopes of being more and more a helper of their joy. Accordingly, when any objections began to be occasionally started, I considered them as mere mistakes and misapprehensions of my meaning ; being averse to the last degree from thinking otherwise concerning any of them, than that they knew the true grace of God. Knowing and finding that this free gospel was the *only* hope for a sinner, and the *only* hope of a believer, I could not bear to think that any of them were really destitute of this true hope, or were building upon any false bottom. *This persuasion* in their favour I was determined to maintain as long as I could ; which induced me to proceed in the way I have done, not a tenderness for my own reputation, nor want of confidence about the truth. I now saw that, according to scripture, an opposition hereto was an evident token of perdition ; and accordingly declared, in the most confident and peremptory manner, that this was the only true solid hope, and that every other was delusive and dangerous ; but still thought and hoped that as to particular persons, their opposition to me and my strain of preaching, did not arise from any opposition to the truth, but from some mistakes about my meaning. This likewise
was

was what induced me to avoid all reflection and the air of controversy in public, hoping and wishing to find, notwithstanding all the objections raised, that there might be a real agreement at bottom.

Proceeding thus, I found by degrees the greatest part of your censures justified, *i. e.* I found them verified beyond my expectation, and to my great surprize, scarcely believing what I saw and heard, still hoping the opposition might arise from some mutual mistake. This animated me to be still, if possible, more plain, full, and explicit, and to chuse out such phrases as might *most* distinctly discover my real meaning. I never, as I can recollect, aimed to embellish the gospel; for, indeed, this I knew myself incapable of, even in the *carnal* sense of the word; but only to use such language as my hearers may be supposed best to understand; many times adopting the usual phrases in order to shew in what sense they may be safely understood, and in what senses they conveyed ideas contrary to the truth. Upon the whole, wherein soever it may appear that I was encumbered, retarded, or deterred in declaring the gospel, it arose not from a concern about the opinion others may form of me, but from the favourable sentiment I was still desirous to entertain concerning them. This you may evidently perceive was the real case, by the strain of those sentences in my two addresses to the church, which you have quoted and remarked upon; and I am now persuaded that the introducing such saving clauses could answer no good end but rather a *bad* one. Had it been now to do over again, I should have withheld any such intimations and suppositions in their favour: for I see they are rather detrimental to the cause of truth, as they served to afford a pleasure and support to their minds from my favourable opinion of them; while I

was

was for acknowledging them to be godly, even at the time they were opposing that gospel, which alone could make them such in the believing it. I now see that whatever their state might be in the *eye of God*, which I have nothing to do with immediately, yet such concessions tend only to conciliate their favour by gratifying their pride; whereas the true gospel teaches a person to derive his hope and pleasure not from the good opinion he may have of himself, or which others may have concerning him, but purely and directly from what he believes concerning Christ and the freeness of his grace.

By reason of the power and prevalency of that charitable opinion in my mind, you see that I was not at first sufficiently instructed to act with that resolution and upon that plan which you suggest, though I now believe it would have been just and proper. I did not see far enough into the nature and strength and extent of the opposition that there is in the hearts of men to this gospel; and therefore I now esteem it a great mercy in providence that I could not at first obtain an answer to the question I put to the church; for the decision being postponed, the ferment continued and increased from that time forward, so that a more earnest attention was raised to the merits of the controversy; and by the time the division was made, I have reason to think that the whole number with me perceived what they were about, and were made to prefer this view of the gospel to every other, finding it to be the true grace of God wherein we stand. O may the Lord enlighten us all more and more, that we may farther distinguish the things that differ, and discover to us more of the sinfulness, deceit, and danger of that propensity there is in us all to forsake the fountain of living waters, &c.

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Had the hurry and discomposure of spirit, which was in me at that extraordinary season, been of the nature which you have described, I should have seen no reason to repent of it : *i. e.* had it consisted in expressing most freely and fervently a displeasure against and a detestation of such a horrid profanation : neither, indeed, was I sparing in this respect, in all conversation amongst ourselves, or with them upon it. But alas ! I was so overpowered as to lose the command of my own temper, thoughts, and words for a few minutes.

Your remarks upon my conduct when I delivered out the free grace to the church are very proper and just in themselves ; and would have been strictly applicable to me, had the design of that piece of conduct been to support the credit of my own conversion in the sight of others. My *principal* aim was to express the strong sense I had of the great importance of this truth in a dying hour, and to be a means of striking their minds with the same. When this reflection has been occasionally cast in my teeth, that my doctrine supposes I had never been converted till of late, my usual answer has been, that my hope was not raised or supported by an answer to that question, how long I had been converted, nor by any reflection I made upon past experiences ; nor by any opinion I framed in favour of myself, but purely by the gospel of free grace.

As to the two close pertinent questions you put towards the conclusion of your letter, I shall only say, that we have so learned Christ as to answer them in the affirmative.

You own that it was by *degrees* the churches among you have attained to their present view of the christian faith and order ; and I know no better way for us to improve in both, than the method you have taken. O may a spirit of true
faith-

faithfulness and godly jealousy prevail and increase among us, that we may be made to see farther and farther into the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

We are now joined together purely upon the footing of *the truth*, and receive none amongst us but such as give evident proof of their discerning the difference between this view of the gospel and every other; and of their being of the truth in faith and practice. Our term of communion then is *the truth*, the love of it, and an apparent readiness to obey it. To express and promote our mutual love for the truth's sake, we communicate in the Lord's supper almost every Lord's day. We propose to go on hand in hand searching the divine oracles, and conversing with each other upon its doctrines and practical contents; and therefore our church-meetings on the week-day, are spent in free conversation upon spiritual subjects, each brother being called upon and desired to speak his mind without reserve; and you know we can proceed no farther nor faster than evidence arises to our minds; hoping that the spirit of truth will lead us on step by step; being persuaded that the truth we profess will make us readily comply with whatever we may find the Lord requires, (without regarding the traditions of men or rudiments of the world) so far as it has an influence upon our minds by the spirit.

Thus I have given you a true copy of the state of things with us; and as I dare not act to conciliate favour with those who oppose the truth, so I do not write in this strain to conciliate favour with you. At which I am certain you cannot be displeased, if you remember that *nothing* but a direct regard to the instructions and injunctions of *the word*, ought to be the rule and reason of our conduct. If you and we are not brought into union upon *this footing*, 'tis no great matter whether ever we are united or no: neither can there

ever be any full argument between us, unless by the force of scripture evidence, we should be brought to see the propriety of *all* the terms of communion settled among you; or you should be brought by the same evidence to give up the *necessity* of them. But till this come to pass on the one side or the other, so that we can carry on fellowship upon *equal* terms, we can only regard you for the sake of that most precious important truth which we both hold; praying that if it were the will of the Lord, *all* those who have one hope of divine calling, may be joined together in one body and in one spirit. 'Tis certainly very desirable it should be so; but I see no prospect of its ever coming to pass, but upon the footing of that lesson taught us, *Rom. 14*. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.—I apprehend, that the love of the truth, wherever it prevails, will be of such extensive influence, that 'twill either make them that believe to be exactly of the same mind; or else, as I may say, will *swallow up* every little occasional difference that may arise in circumstantial affairs; and so no breach upon brotherly love will ensue on that account.—I cannot but be persuaded (from the tenor and design of that chapter) that one genuine influence of the truth, is to make us bear with one another in lesser matters, rather than rend the body of Christ into several divisions, by an over attachment to a strict uniformity. If persons appearing to have a conscientious regard to the laws of Christ, shall fall into some different sentiments about the meaning of particular texts of scripture, not through any disregard to Christ's authority, or a regard to the traditions of men, but merely because they conceive the words of scripture in different senses, about points that do not in the least affect the foundation of hope; I see no reason why these may not love as brethren and appear to be *one* body in Christ. If

If then either side should lay such an important stress upon a circumstantial, as to break the union of the church, or refuse admitting any to communion merely on that account, these discover a want of brotherly love; and shew that their hearts are so attached to lesser matters, as to discover that they have, in some degree, lost sight of the glory and importance of the saving truth, even that truth which is the bond of union; and which, if properly regarded, would make every little difference to disappear, in comparison of the glory and value of that wherein is contained the ground of hope and the centre of love. Wishing you all grace and peace from Jesus Christ, I rest

Yours, for the truth's sake,

S. P.

P. S. Notwithstanding what is above urged upon the point of forbearance, I should be glad to know what you have to offer *from scripture*, in favour of such particulars wherein we differ from you in regard to gospel-order and practice.

R. S. to S. P.

In the Postscript of a Letter to a Friend.

MAKE my compliments to Mr. Pike for his courteous letter of *November 25*, and let him know, that by what I learn from his letters and otherwise, he appears too much of a religious politician for me: so that it seems needless to weary myself in writing or him in reading, reasonings at length on the mind of the scripture; at least

least till I have better reason to think that the scripture is his only rule, exclusive of other prudential considerations.

Mr. *Pike* writes me, "I should be glad to know what you have to offer from scripture in favour of such particulars wherein we differ from you in regard to gospel-order and practice." For answer; I cannot well do this unless he shall be pleased to tell me the particulars wherein he differs from us and the reasons of his difference. And in the first place he might tell me, where he reads in the New Testament of a church without a presbytery, or having only one elder. As to his reference to *Rom. 14*, ch. on the point of forbearance, I think it might be of service to him, to consider what Mr. *Glas* has wrote on that chapter against *Whitfield's* catholic charity. It is evident, that in every christian church much forbearance must be used; yet it is no less evident, that a church member may discover such a disposition in his reasoning against the least of Christ's words, as may shew him unworthy of communion.

R. S.



F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

Page 45, line 32, for *see*, read *seek*. Page 57, l. 22, for *10* r. *of*. Page 64, line 24, caret *here*, after *case*. Page 72, l. 29, caret, after *care of*, the *shepherd of*. Page 75, l. 24, dele *10*.

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